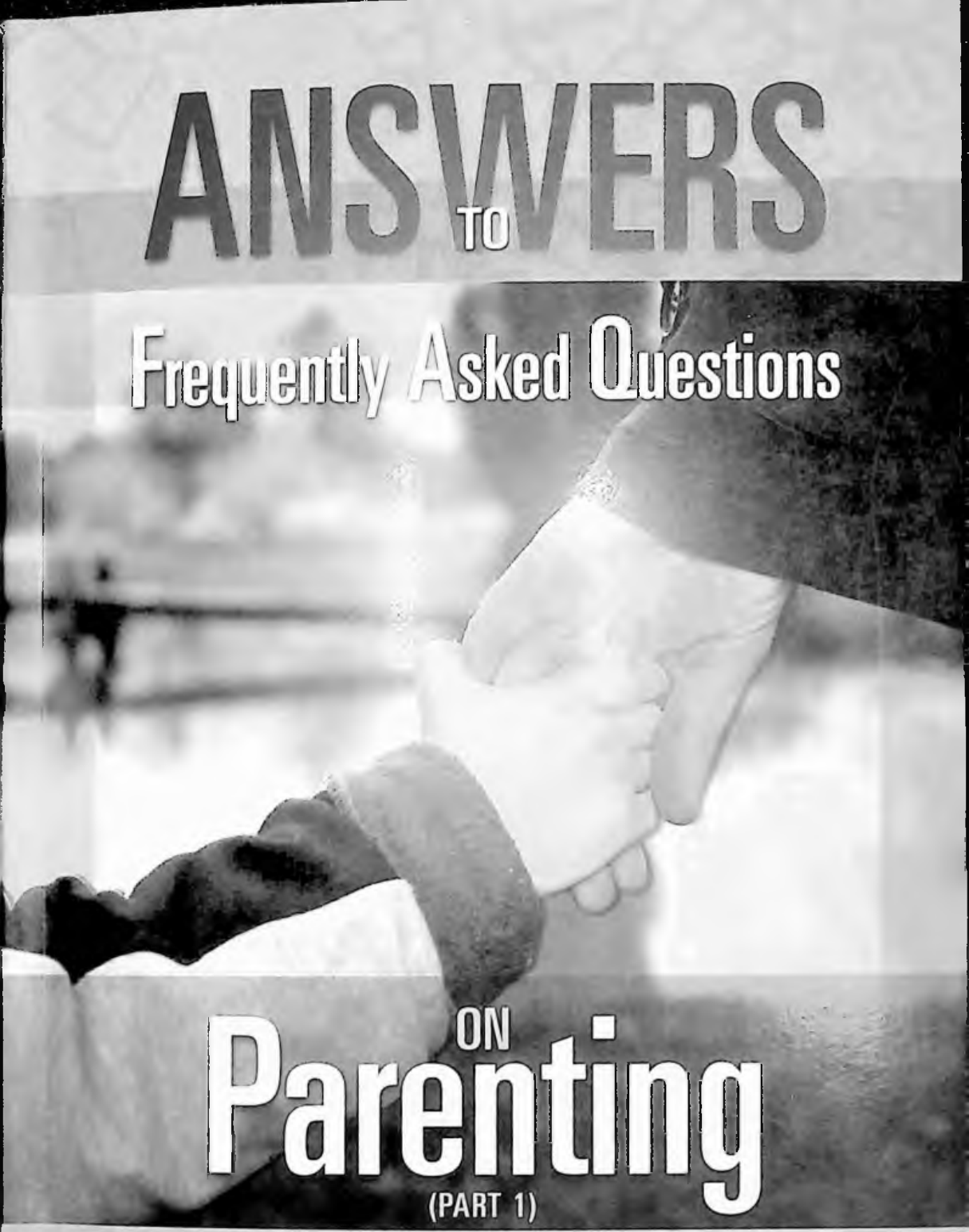

ANSWERS TO Frequently Asked Questions ON Parenting (PART 1)

Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Rida Beshir

amana publications

Answers

to

Frequently Asked Questions

on

Parenting

[PART 1]

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We kindly request that every reader make *du'a* for her.

Introduction

At various conferences and conventions, when conducting parenting workshops and presenting lectures on the subject of raising children in North American society, we usually allocate time to answer questions from the audience. We try our best during these question and answer sessions to respond in the most comprehensive way. However, with a hot topic such as parenting, particularly in North America, there is never enough time to give detailed answers and, at the same time, respond to as many questions as possible. In addition, some of these questions have been raised more than once in recent years. Because of this, we feel that these questions represent crucial issues of concern occupying the minds of a great majority of parents. As such, they deserve to be addressed in enough detail to be clarified and to provide Muslim parents with the proper advice supported by the *Qur'an* as well as the teachings of the prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.

This is why we decided to write this series of books on frequently asked questions about raising children in North America.

It is important to note that all the questions in this series are actual questions that were asked at one time or another by workshop participants or conference and convention audience members, as well as during our live dialogues on various Websites such as *www.masnet.org* and *www.islamonline.net*.

Rather than waiting to publish a large volume covering all the questions, we decided to publish this series in small volumes to make the answers to these pressing questions immediately available to our readers.

It is also our intention, *insha'a Allah*, to continue publishing additional parts in this series, at short intervals, as we continue to receive new questions. We will try, to the extent possible, to group the questions

according to the subject matter to make it easier for readers to find what they are looking for.

We would like to emphasize that our methodology in answering these questions, as has always been the case with our books, will be from an Islamic perspective drawing heavily on verses of the *Qur'an*, teachings of the prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events in his *Seerah*. We will also, *insha'a Allah*, draw on our wealth of practical experience, gained from countless parenting counseling sessions over the years, and our knowledge of child psychology.

This first part is divided into seven main categories covering questions related to correcting behavior, environment, Islamic identity, schooling, celebrations, sex education, and miscellaneous questions. We tried our best to respect this categorization; however, with subjects like these, there was some overlap.

We realize that this is a huge responsibility and we sincerely pray to Allah *SWT* to help us provide the right answers to these questions as well as to make this series beneficial to as many Muslim families as possible, as they seek to be the best Muslim parents for their children. We also ask Him to protect our Muslim families, our Muslim youth, our Muslim children and the entire Muslim *Ummah*.

Drs. Ekram & M. Rida Beshir

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Correcting Behavior

Q. 1

My husband always uses the traditional methods and ways—with all their positive and negative aspects—in dealing with our children. He always says: "My opinion is right and this is the proper way to deal with the children. Our parents used to do it this way and it worked on us." I feel that this is not right. Can you please advise me what to do?

Answer

Thank you very much, Sister, for your question. To answer this, a few points must be considered. They are:

• We have to agree first that, as Muslims, our main points of reference are the Qur'an and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. We should always refer any question to these original sources. No matter who used any principles before us, we have to check these principles against these main references.

• The Qur'an condemns blind imitation and suggests that believers should always find and use the proper guidelines to regulate their lives rather than follow their forefathers blindly.[1]

• Traditions are not necessarily always Islamic. Some traditions may have their origins in Islamic values while others may not, and yet others could be neutral. If the traditional methods your husband is using are based on Islamic principles, you should support him and try to use them yourself. If the traditional methods you are referring to have no basis in Islam, or go against the Islamic spirit and guidelines, it is your duty to kindly talk about this issue with your husband and remind him in a gentle manner that we should not follow these un-Islamic traditions.

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[1] (Q43, V22-24)

• The statement that "***Our parents used to do it this way and it worked on us***" should not justify using these methods if they are not suitable for our times and environment. Ali Ibn Abi Taleb *RAA* is reported to have said: "Raise your children using ways different from the ways used with you, because they were created for times other than your times."[2] Imagine, this advice was given 14 centuries ago, when life was very slow. What about our time and age? Considering that things are changing so quickly and that the environment in North America is very different from the environment in countries where Muslims live as a majority, we need this wisdom even more, here and now.

[2] Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb enscolopedia by Muhammad Jawwad Mughneiah, Arabic, *Dar Al-Tayyar Al-Jadeed* for printing and Publications, Bayroot, Lebanon, 2004)

Q. 2

Can you please advise us of the most suitable way to resolve conflicts among our children? For example, my 5-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son are always fighting about who has the right to play with a certain toy. What should I do with them?

Answer

Conflicts are part of life and they do happen, particularly among children (siblings), especially when they are close in age. Suitable solutions to such conflicts greatly depend on the reason for the conflict. Most of the time, in the case of young children, the conflict and fight is related to either a toy or a book that each of them want. Here are some guidelines to avoid this type of conflict:

• Set very clear rules of ownership. If the toy belongs to one child, he or she has the right to allow or not allow the other child to use it; Islam recognizes individual ownership and, at the same time, encourages sharing. Be careful, however. Do not deny anybody a right that is given to him or her by Allah SWT, even in the name of creating more sharing Muslims. This may cause sibling rivalry and resentment.

• If the toy is common, that is, it does not belong to a specific child, make sure that equal sharing is the rule. Set a specific time for each child to use the toy, for example, two to five minutes per turn, depending on the nature of the toy.

• Do not rush to solve the problem for your children. Allow them to resolve the situation themselves.

• Deal with your children equally. Do not favour one child over the other because of age, particularly if they are still young and close in age.

- Be fair in all your actions with them.
- Provide them with games and toys that can only be played by more than one person. This will teach them to cooperate and will improve their social skills by making them deal with each other.
- Tell them stories about the importance of cooperating and how important it is for siblings to bond. Make sure that the language you use is suitable for their age.

We would like to point out here that it is very important to train our children on proper Islamic conflict resolution from a young age. This will help them avoid future sibling rivalries, enmity and jealousy. At a young age, they may fight about toys and books, but if they do not learn proper conflict-resolution methodology and techniques early enough in their lives, their inability to resolve conflicts may stay with them when they grow older, and they may start fighting about more serious matters such as inheritance.

Family is the cornerstone of Muslim society. We should keep it very strong and intact by maintaining harmony among family members and by raising our children with the right Islamic guidance in every sphere of life to ensure the continuity of a strong family unit *insha'a Allah*.

Q. 3

I have two sons, six and four years old. I have noticed that my six year old is sociable and outgoing. He likes to meet new children and can make friends with them. As for my four year old, he is more withdrawn, shy, and it takes him a long time to warm up to other children and play with them. Could this be their nature, or could we have caused this to happen because of how we are treating them? Is there anything we can do to help our younger son be more sociable and get over his shyness?

Answer

We thank the questioner for being observant and noticing these differences between her sons. This is a good quality for parents to have and it helps them recognize their children's traits early and take steps towards modifying their temperament to reach a healthy balanced point.

Every child is born with their own temperament and combination of various traits. A child could be inclined towards being sociable while his own brother could naturally be shy and withdrawn. The environment also has its own influence on a child's character. The child's temperament and surroundings mutually influence each other. A shy baby who cries and creams when someone tries to play with him would cause people around im to stay away and not play with him as much as they would with nother baby who smiles at them. Another example is when a father takes his daughter to swimming classes and she fights and screams before getting into the water. That would discourage the father from taking her to such classes very often and would reinforce the withdrawn characteristic of this child.

The role of parents is to provide an environment that might help the child modify his character and be more in the middle of the road. For example,

instead of following your natural instinct to avoid your shy toddler, approach him in a gentle and gradual way, or take him to play groups where he has the opportunity to play with other toddlers in the comfort of his mother's presence. Do not be discouraged by the child's crying and fussing when he is around other children. Continue to attend the play groups in order to expose him to more children. Eventually, with your assurance, he will feel more comfortable and be able to play and share in activities with other children.

Taking a toddler or preschool-aged child to the park would give him a good opportunity to get over his shyness. While he is using the play structure and being around other children, he will develop a level of comfort and confidence in his ability to deal with other children.

Parents may also enroll their children in various classes that teach them skills such as swimming, self defense, and other sports While the child's focus will be on learning these skills, he will also acquire the social skills necessary to deal with people, cultivate (reinforce) his self-confidence, and he will get over his shyness.

My son is three years old. He is generally shy. Frequently, when we go to visit other families, he becomes stubborn and stands outside refusing to enter the house. I keep telling him to go inside, but to no avail. Finally, I literally have to drag him inside the house while he is screaming. That makes me very embarrassed. Can you please advise me what to do in this case?

Answer

Your son might be naturally shy and may need time to change places and be around new people. It is good that you are taking him to visit new people and places. This will help him get over his shyness *insha'a Allah*. Here are a few suggestions to improve the situation:

• Prepare him before the visit by talking with him about the people he is going to meet and the children that he will play with. You could do this as early as one day before the visit.

• While you are driving to your friends' house, talk to him again in detail to refresh his mind about where you are going and what you are going to) once you get out of the car. For example, you could say: "When we ve and get of the car, you might like to be the one who knocks on the or or rings the bell. When they open, we will all say *Assalamu aykum warahmatu Allah wabarakatuhu* and shake hands with our nosts. We will then go inside the house and sit where the host tells us. We will chat a little bit with them. After that, whenever you feel like it, you can go and play with the children in the house."

• Whenever a situation arises where he refuses to enter the host's house, stay calm. Talk to the hosts and ask their permission to stay outside for a few moments. Talk with your son calmly, assuring him that things will be

all right, that you will go inside and that he can stay by your side until he feels like playing with the other children. Do not get upset with him for not wanting to go inside. If it takes too long you can tell him calmly, "I'm going inside now, and you can come in when you are ready." Enter the house, leave the door open and stay near the door where you can observe him for safety.

• Please also read the answer to the previous question for a long-term plan that you can use to help your son get over his shyness and improve his social skills.

Q. 5

My daughter is five years old. Every time we visit a new family that she did not know before, she insists on staying by my side during the entire visit. Even if the family has children her age, she does not play with them. Also, when I take her to the park to play, she only plays very close to me and does not use any play structure at the same time that other children are using it. She tries to stay away from any area that has other children. How can I help her get over her shyness?

Answer

Your daughter could be naturally shy. Firstly, preparing the child is a key factor in helping her warm up to new surroundings and new people. Please see the answer to the previous question for further details. Secondly, working with the child on a long-term plan to help her get over her shyness and improve her social skills is also important. Please see the answers to the previous two questions for details on this aspect. Finally, here are some additional suggestions for your specific case:

• While visiting other families, you may ask the host's permission to go with your daughter to the area where the children are playing. Stay there with her for a while, encouraging her to be part of what they are doing. If you feel that you need to be participating yourself to help your daughter be involved, you can do that, too.

• Praise your daughter for her participation, no matter how little it may be, and show your interest in the games she was playing with the children. It does not help to tell the child repeatedly to "go and play with the kids" or to say: "why aren't you playing with them?"

• Invite children to your home to play with your daughter. It is always better in the beginning to invite only one child at a time in order to prevent the visiting children from leaving your daughter out by playing only with each other. Later, when she has developed a greater ability to make friends, you can invite more children at the same time.

Use these same techniques when you take your daughter to the park. Also try to bring one of her friends with you when you go to the park.

I read in one of your books that each child tends to pick up a personality in accordance with her birth number. My question is, how would you change the personality of the "trouble making" child? Or how would you change any other personality that is not proper or desired?

Answer

First, let us clarify the issue of picking up a personality based on the child's birth number. Position within the family is not the only factor that affects a child's personality. It is only one of the factors that can affect a child's personality. Other very important factors that may have an even greater impact include family atmosphere and methods of training. Position within the family is only significant for two reasons. First, no two children will have the same position unless they are twins. Second, children do not usually want to compete for the same personality. As for the other factors, parents can make sure that the family atmosphere is the same for every child and use the same methods of training that produce positive results.

Will one of the children inevitably take on the trouble making personality because of her birth number? Of course not. But there is a possibility that one of them will do so while in the process of finding her position within the family dynamics. That is why parents must be alert and observant, and monitor the behavior of their children to detect any tendency toward bad or negative behavior. As soon as parents detect any negative behavior, they should correct it in the proper manner. We recommend using the Indicate, Educate and Train technique. This is a recommended Islamic method of correcting and changing a child's negative behavior. It consists of three steps:

1. **Indicate** clearly to the child her mistake or unacceptable behavior in a very calm but firm manner. For example, if the child was disrespectful by speaking to an older person in a rude tone of voice or by making faces at the person she was talking to, the parent who is dealing with the situation should assume that the child did not know better, and then indicate to her that this behavior is not acceptable. Do this by using an appropriate comment that suits the child's age and a firm tone of voice that is calm and not angry. It is important to emphasize here that this should be done in a very respectful way, to set an example and to show the child how you want her to behave.

2. **Educate** the child about the issue at hand using verses from the *Qur'an* and teachings of the prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. For example, when responding to disrespect, the parent could mention the following saying of the prophet Muhammad *SAAW*:

> "The one who does not have mercy on our young ones and does not show respect to our elders is not one of us."[3]

Referring to verses from the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet *SAAW* helps the child understand that our ultimate reference is to the orders of Allah *SWT*, and that even parents are expected to obey these orders. This will also help parents avoid confrontations with their children. It removes the factors that cause power struggles, since the parents are not making up the rules and imposing them on the children, but actually, both the parents and the children are following Allah's rules.

3. **Train** the child to frequently practice the correct behavior in the proper way, with your guidance. Do not expect that, by following these steps once, the child will behave appropriately all the time and not repeat the mistake. You need to repeat the process each time the child repeats the mistake or behaves in an unacceptable manner. You may have to do it more than once until it becomes a habit for the child. Training and practice makes perfect.

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[3] Thirmidhi

For more examples and a detailed explanation of this technique, please refer to our book entitled *Parenting Skills based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.*[4]

We can also recommend that you try to identify one or more good qualities that this child has. Then make her feel good about having such qualities by encouraging her to use them. For example, if you notice that she is good at dealing with younger children, enhance this quality in her by providing her with the opportunity to interact with and supervise young children during activities at your local Islamic centre. This way, rather than resorting to mischief, she will feel valued and gain a sense of self-worth by contributing to a worthwhile cause. If you notice that the child is good at artistic expression, let her gain her sense of self-worth by contributing in this area. For example, give her the responsibility of making the posters for your next event at the mosque. This will divert her attention away from negative, trouble-making behavior. Feeling rewarded for her contribution will also help her avoid negative behaviors associated with being a troublemaker.

[4] Beshir, Dr. Ekram and Dr. Mohamed Rida. *Parenting Skills based on the Qur'an and Sunnah*. First edition. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2004.

Q. 7

In one of your workshops you explained the "Indicate, Educate, Follow Up" technique to correct and modify children's behavior. You pointed out, in the Educate part, that parents have to use either a verse from Qur'an or a saying of the Prophet SAAW to support their argument. However, I find it difficult to identify the relevant verses or hadeeths to use. As a matter of fact, I believe that many parents are in the same situation. Would it be enough to say to my child that this is Islamically wrong, or Muslims are not supposed to do this?

Answer

We appreciate this parent's concern and understand that it is not easy to memorize all Qur'anic verses and *hadeeths* related to the various virtues that we want to help our children acquire. We are not asking parents to be scholars of Islam and know every verse of the Qur'an and every *hadeeth* the Prophet (*SAAW*) ever said. Yet there is a basic minimum level of knowledge that every parent should have. In addition to the knowledge that parents need to properly practice their *deen*, they must also acquire the knowledge to correctly do the most important job in life—parent their children. Included in this knowledge are various issues related to the problems facing children and teenagers in this society. It is of absolute importance to instill certain Islamic concepts in your teens and develop certain characteristics in their personality to ensure that they grow up to be confident and strong Muslims. Among these concepts are: Allah *SWT* loves you; life is a test; our real home is in the Hereafter; Allah *SWT* is with you at all times; patience is a great virtue; Islam is a complete way of life; we will all meet Allah as individuals on the Day of Judgment; we are accountable for whatever we hear,

see, or think about; choose your friends carefully; and so on. We refer the reader to chapter six of our book entitled *Muslim Teens*[5] for all the verses and *ahadeeth* related to these concepts. As for the Qur'anic verses related to various virtues and positive characteristics, the Islamic literature that is available on this subject is indeed plentiful. A book by the late Sheikh Muhammad Al-Ghazali entitled *The Muslim Character*, and a book by the late Sheikh Abdel-Fatah Abu Ghodah entitled *Islamic Manners* are two very good sources on this subject. Complete information about these books is listed in the reference section at the back of this book.

We do feel that it is not enough to say to our children: "This is incorrect Islamically" or "Muslims should not do this." Your children are growing up in a different environment and they need to understand the logic behind orders to be able to stand tall and strong with their differences and resist the temptation to follow the crowd. They also need to acquire this knowledge so they can answer questions directed to them by their peers in an intelligent way that does not have a negative impact on their confidence, self-esteem and personality. This, in turn, will help them feel proud to be Muslims and prevent them from compromising their *deen*.

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[5] Beshir, Dr. Ekram and Dr. Mohamed Rida. *Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope, A practical Islamic Guide*. Second edition. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2003.

When do you ignore a child's negative behavior and when do you train him with the correct behavior?

Answer In our view, the word ignore is not the right word to use in this situation. A better way to put it, which the reader may have meant, is to not give attention to the child's negative behavior. If the behavior is related to trivial matters—such as a young child (two to three years old) opening the refrigerator door or making a certain annoying noise just to get his parents' attention, do not give such behavior any attention. Indeed, you should ignore it. However, you have to try to find out why the child is doing this so often. Most likely, he is doing it because he is bored; he does not have anything else interesting to do. Parents should try to rectify the problem of boredom, and, *insha'a Allah*, the child's trivial negative behavior will automatically be taken care of.

If the child's behavior is hurting somebody else, you should never ignore it. You should work on correcting the behavior rather than just shout at your child and condemn his actions. The **"Indicate, Educate, and Train"** technique—as described in detail in the answer to previous questions in this book—could be effectively used to train the child to have the right behavior.

Q. 9

I read in one of your books about the technique of "Indicate, Educate, Follow Up and Train" to help our children improve their behavior and eliminate their shortcomings. I found it very interesting and I am trying to use it with my children. However, how can I measure the success of my attempts and how long should the training continue?

Answer

We are glad that you find this technique useful and are using it with your children. There is no single answer to this question. The training period could be as short as a few days for minor behavioural problems, and as long as three years for more important matters such as training the child to observe and establish prayer regularly. We can see this in the following statement of the Prophet *SAAW*: "Train your children to perform prayers at the age of seven and punish them for neglecting it at the age of ten."[6] The training period depends on a few factors, such as the behavior you want to change, how consistent you are in applying the technique, and the presence of other supporting factors. For example, if the behaviour you want to change is fighting with other siblings, the presence of the following factors would help in training the child to change her behavior:

- Parents must deal with all family members fairly and not favour one child over another.
- Parents must make sure that other siblings are not teasing the child in question and triggering her to start such fights.

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[6] Sunnan Abu Dawud, and Tirmidhi

• A visual follow-up system to monitor the child's progress can be very helpful. If the child is young (around four to eight years old), a chart on the refrigerator door with check marks or stickers to be granted every time she behaves according to the required standard, or avoids doing the negative behaviour, would be very helpful. If the child is older (a pre-teen or teenager), a written contract between the child and the parent to deal with the behaviour in question works well for monitoring progress.[7]

[7] Refer to chapter nine of our book *Muslim Teens* for details on how to write the contract properly.

Q. 10

In your opinion, what is the best way to raise our children in the West?

Answer To start with, the road to successfully raising our children in the West is a rough one. It requires parents to check their concepts and distinguish between what is Islamic and what is cultural. Parents must understand that children like to imitate and fit in with whoever surrounds them. They need to build a good relationship with their children in order for the children to be willing to cooperate with and listen to them. In this sense, parents must spend time sharing activities with their children. They must also be role models in terms of their behaviour. Hence, the traditional method of telling children what to do without modeling that behavior does not work. In other words, you must practice what you preach.

Moreover, parents need to provide alternatives to the activities practiced by the mainstream culture that are not fit for their children. Take the example of a Halloween party. If parents do not want their child to go to a Halloween party, they should arrange for an alternative activity, such as visiting another family with whom your children enjoy spending time with. In this way, they will not feel that they are missing out on any fun when non-Muslim children are enjoying their holidays.[8]

[8] See a detailed answer on participating in Western celebrations later in this book.

Parents require three things to raise children properly in the West. Firstly, they must know the Islamic principles of raising children[9] and be familiar with the environment the children are living in. Secondly, they need wisdom in dealing with matters concerning children because different children require different approaches. Wisdom is also needed to discern how much the children are exposed to the mainstream culture and how much information they are taking from it. Thirdly, parents must put forth the effort to apply all of these principles. This can only succeed if parents consider their children among the top priorities in their lives.

The willingness of parents to change their parenting style is another very important factor that contributes to their success in raising children in the West. They must be willing to go through a self-search process to identify any negative parental behaviours they may have and make a commitment to change them into positive parental behaviours.

[9] For details on principles of Islamic methods of raising children see chapter two of our book entitled Parenting in the West as well as our book entitled *Parenting Skills Based on the Qur'an and Sunnah*. Both books are published by Amana Publications.

Q. 11

I have a difficult seven-year-old boy. He is not listening to me and my wife. He only wants to play and does not want to do his homework. What is your advice?

Answer

It is very natural for a seven-year-old child to want to play all the time. Of course, as parents, we do not want them to do this. How you give directions to your son will make a lot of difference in how he responds to you. Start the day with him on good terms by, for example, greeting him in the morning, giving him a hug and displaying lots of affection towards him.

Once these preliminary steps are taken, which strengthen the bond between parent and child, you can make an agreement with your child about one or two objectives that he must achieve that day. Let him know that once he reaches his goals, you will go with him to the park or do something else that he likes. In this way the boy will see the connection between finishing his tasks and using the rest of the time to enjoy playful activities that he likes to engage in.

Parents should not reprimand the child over and over again for not doing his work. Instead, they should follow up on his work with a chart on which he is given a star or sticker for finishing his work. Homework tasks should be done in 15- to 20-minute time slots. Then the child should be allowed ten minutes to play, rest or engage in a different activity. Lots of encouragement should be given for even the slightest improvement.

In other words, the emphasis should be on what the child can do rather than on what he cannot do.

Parents should try to answer their child's questions with a yes rather than a no. For example, if he asks: "Can I go to the park, Dad?", rather then saying: "No. You didn't finish your homework," say "Yes, we can go after you finish your homework *insha'a Allah*." This approach makes a big difference to the children.

It is important not to think of your child as a difficult child; instead, you should understand that each child needs to be dealt with in a manner that suits his personality. Maybe your son needs a lot of attention and love, and when he does not receive it, he resorts to mischievous behavior in order to get your attention.

Q. 12

Can you give some good reference materials on raising children in Islam? Are Dr. Seuss books acceptable from an Islamic point of view?

Answer

There is a wealth of literature in English on raising children, the first of which is the Website called Islam On-line, www.islamonline.net. We also recommend our three books: Meeting the Challenges of Parenting in the West: an Islamic Perspective; *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry and Tomorrows Hope; and Parenting Skills Based on the Qur'an and Sunnah*. All of these books are published by Amana Publications. There are other books by Muslim writers available. If you go to the Website of the Islamic Society of North America, www.isna.net, under the media mall's family section, you will find many books about parenting. Other good books that deal with parenting in North America are found on the SoundVision Website, *www.soundvision.com*, which has a family section that includes a lot of good material.

We can also recommend good books written by non-Muslims. The following are especially relevant: Teaching Your Children Values, *Teaching Your Children Responsibility,* and *How to talk so kids will listen* and *listen so kids can talk*. The first two books are written by Linda and Richard Eyre and the third book is by Adle Faber. One note of caution about child-rearing books written by non-Muslims is that you should make sure that the message of the book does not contradict Islamic values.

There are many children's books available in public libraries and used by teachers and parents as teaching tools, such as those written by Dr. Seuss. However, parents have a duty to screen all books before allowing their children to read them, again, to make sure that their message does not contradict any Islamic values.

Q. 13

In your opinion, what is the most effective punishment for a misbehaving toddler?

Answer Dealing with toddlers is a sensitive situation. Punishment should not be used to make a toddler cooperate. Depending on the situation, parents must choose different methods. In some situations, ignoring the toddler completely is the best method. In other situations, you may have to use a time out. Physical punishment should not be used at all with toddlers. Parents should learn the Islamic principles of raising children rather than immediately resorting to punishment. Please see chapters two and four of our book entitled *Parenting in the West* as well as our book entitled *Parenting Skills Based on the Qur'an and Sunnah* (both are published by Amana Publications) for a synopsis of Islamic parenting principles and their practical applications.

Q. 14

From an Islamic and psychological perspective, is giving children too much attention and care when they are young good or bad for them? Also, should children be taught to be independent when they are toddlers, for example, not allowed to sleep with their parents, and so on? Some doctors recommend attachment parenting, where children are frequently cuddled, allowed to sleep with their parents, and continually given affection. Is that good or bad?

Answer

It is very important for the mental and emotional development of growing children that they receive plenty of attention from their parents, while also being taught responsibility and manners. When a parent—either the mother or the father—spends time playing with the child, for example, taking her to the park or teaching her how to ride a bicycle, all of this kind of attention will help the child gain self–confidence, acquire skills and feel loved by her parents. Meanwhile, teaching the child to be respectful of her parents, share with other friends, learn how to dress herself, and help with carrying her own toys when going to the park will make it a learning experience. It is natural for children to always seek attention; however, parents should reward the positive behavior of the child with attention and ignore the negative trivial behavior.

As for your second question, toddlers need to learn to sleep in their own beds, maybe in a separate room. The important thing here is to spend enough time with the child when she is awake. Give the child a special time slot where she receives a lot of attention before going to bed. The following are examples of activities parents can do with their children during this time slot:

- Sit with the child(ren) to eat a snack together.
- Tell a bedtime story in a playful way.
- Give them a bath, allow them to use the washroom and have a sip of water.
- Read the Qur'an to them and put your hand on each of the children's forehead while reading the Qur'an to them.
- If they are old enough, the children should be made to repeat the bedtime du'a with their parents. If the children are not old enough to repeat it, the parents should recite it aloud to them.
- Explain the meaning of the bedtime du'a as a tool to make them sleep safely and wake up comfortably.
- Play an audio tape of the Qur'an in the room, kiss them goodnight and leave the room.

With very young children, make sure that they are clean and fed before you put them to bed. This prevents them from calling you for these things once they are in bed. You can leave a toy or book that they like in bed, for them to look at until they fall asleep. You may leave on a dim light in the room so they do not feel they have to fall asleep immediately. Try to maintain a consistent bedtime, give or take an hour.

Q. 15

How can I deal with a jealous child who likes to have everything for himself?

Answer

Treating all children with fairness and having clear, general rules for the family and children will cut down on a lot of problems related to jealousy. Providing a warm and positive family atmosphere where parents get along with each other in an honorable, kind and dignified way helps tremendously in reducing the amount of jealousy among siblings. Research indicates that when all children are satisfied with the warm affection they receive from their parents, they have less reason to begrudge the attention their parents give to their brothers and sisters.[10]

Also, a child who seems jealous sometimes needs reassurance that his parents love him. The parents will tell the child that they love him, but they have the duty of raising him to be a good person; therefore, they must still reinforce the clear rules of the house.

These are some general guidelines for reducing jealousy and sibling rivalry. If you would like a more specific answer tailored to your own case, please be more specific in your question. We will need more information about the following:

- The child's age and gender
- The number of children in the family
- The position of this child within the family (i.e., oldest, youngest, or middle)

Examples of the child's behavior, which make you identify him as a jealous child.

[10] *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care*

Q. 16

What is your view on physical punishment (hitting or spanking) as a way of correcting children's behavior? Is it okay to spank or hit a child when he makes a mistake? I am confused. Sometimes we get the answer that it is okay and other times that it is not okay. If it is not okay, how do you explain the hadeeth my husband refers to in which the Prophet SAAW says to teach your children to perform salah when they are seven years old and to hit them if they do not perform it when they are ten years old?

Answer

This is a very important question, particularly in the context of North America. To answer this question we have to talk about several points:

- The proper understanding of the *hadeeth* of the Prophet *SAAW*
- Other sayings of the Prophet *SAAW* related to this matter
- Whether or not the Prophet *SAAW* ever used hitting or physical punishment as a way of correcting children's behavior
- The North American environment

Let us discuss these points in detail *insha'a Allah*.

First, the proper understanding of the *hadeeth* that your husband referred to.

This *hadeeth* appears in *Sunnan* Abu Dawud as well as in the Tirmidhi collection of *hadeeth*, with minor variations. The lessons derived from this *hadeeth* are as follows:

• *Salat* is a very important ritual of purification in Islam. As a matter of fact, it is the most important pillar, after the shahada, because it links the weak creatures (humans) with their Creator, the Almighty.

• Training our children for *salat* should be taken very seriously. It may take up to **three years** to train them to observe *salat* regularly and to try their best to perfect its performance. Before parents even consider using physical punishment, they must ask themselves whether they have first spent sufficient time and energy using other, more effective training and *tarbiyah* methods—such as modeling the behavior they want to see in their child or gently advising the child—or whether they are using physical punishment on the spur of the moment to take their anger out on the child.

• In extreme cases, after parents spend up to three years properly training the child, and the child is still regularly missing *salat* or not performing it properly, parents may punish the child physically by hitting him lightly so he can understand the weight of his mistake.

• According to Islam, the responsibility of administering physical punishment must come *only after* intense and proper training have failed and *after* other methods of correcting behavior have failed. Even then, certain conditions must be fulfilled when the physical punishment is administered. The following are some of these conditions:

- Never hit the face.
- Avoid using your own hand; use a very light object such as a natural toothbrush (*miswak*).
- Hitting should be very light and must never leave any mark on the child's body.

All of these conditions indicate that the hitting is very symbolic; it is meant to show that you are disappointed in the child. Again, when parents resort to this technique, they must ask themselves whether they observed all of the above conditions or simply acted out in a fit of rage.

Second, let us look at other sayings of the Prophet *SAAW* related to this matter.

"It was reported on the authority of Abu Hurairah *RAA* that the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* said: 'The strong person is not the one who wrestles but is the one who controls himself in a fit of rage.'"[11]

"Abu Mas'ud Al-Badry *RAA* reported: 'I was beating my slave with a whip when I heard a voice behind me saying: 'Abu Mas'ud, be mindful.' I did not recognize the voice due to my anger. As it approached me, I found that it was coming from the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* who was saying: 'Abu Mas'ud, be mindful. Abu Mas'ud, be mindful.' I threw the whip from my hand. The Prophet *SAAW* said: 'Be mindful Abu Mas'ud. Verily Allah has more dominance over you than you have over your slave.' Then Abu Mas'ud said: 'I would never beat my servant in the future.'"[12]

The above *ahadeeth* indicate that the prophet Muhammad *SAAW* clearly instructed his companions not to use force against anyone, especially children and women. Parents should always find other disciplinary measures and never resort to hitting or using force with their children.[13]

Third, let us examine whether the Prophet *SAAW* ever used hitting or physical punishment as a way of correcting children's behavior.

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[11] Agreed upon

[12] Muslim

[13] Consult our books entitled *Parenting in the West, Muslim Teens* and *Parenting Skills Based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.*

"It was also reported by 'Aisha *RAA* that: 'the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* never hit with his hand either a servant or a woman, but of course he fought in the cause of Allah. He never took revenge on anyone for the torture inflicted upon him, but of course, he exacted retribution for the sake of Allah when the injunctions of Allah were violated.'" [14]

It is very clear from the above hadeeth that the Prophet of Allah *SAAW* never used force against children or women. As Muslims, we should do our best to take him as our ultimate role model; "Indeed in the Messenger of Allah you have the best example to follow for he who hopes in (the meeting with) Allah *SWT* and the Last Day and who remembers Allah *SWT* much." [15]

Finally, let us discuss the situation in North America.

In some provinces in Canada as well as some states in the United States of America, punishing children physically is against the law. It is considered child abuse. The authorities could penalize parents who use such methods by taking their children away from them and placing the children either with the Children's Aid Society or in a foster home. I do not think that any wise Muslim parent is willing to take the risk of having his child raised by a non-Muslim institution. The harm and consequences of such an act are unimaginable and should not be entertained in any way, shape or form just because the parent cannot control his or her anger.

In addition to the above arguments against using hitting or spanking to correct a child's behavior, it is clear that parents who do this are setting a bad example for their children. They are sending the message that *yes, you can settle conflicts and differences by force*. The children may use force against their own younger siblings since their parents feel it is an acceptable method.

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[14] Muslim
[15] (Q33, V21)

There is another very important point we would like to add here. It is related to the low self-esteem of children who are insulted at home and hit or beaten by their parents. As Muslims, our goal is to raise a confident Muslim generation that can stand tall against the monumental challenges that will face it in North American society. We want a generation of proud, strong, confident Muslims. Using force as a means of *tarbiyah* will never produce such a generation.

We would also like to remind parents that using force against your children simply to vent your anger is a very serious mistake. Parents should never use force as revenge against children. After all, one of the names of the Last Day is the Day of *Qesas* (retribution or paybacks). On that day, everyone will have to pay back any rights they may have unjustly taken from somebody else. Even a horned sheep that attacked a sheep without horns during this life will be avenged by the one who was attacked. Thus, if parents hit or beat their children unjustly, they will be held accountable and may have to pay back such deeds to their children on the Day of Judgment.

Parents who think that beating their children is their birthright are seriously mistaken and are definitely committing a serious sin. Hitting children to correct their behavior is a responsibility to be exercised only in extreme cases and only as a last resort, after all other methods and techniques have failed. In addition, when a person severely misuses responsibilities such as this one, the responsibilities should be completely taken away from and not used by that person.

Environment

Q. 17

Our brother is married to a non-Muslim woman. He is not paying much attention to Islam or an Islamic education for his children. We are concerned about their future in North America if they do not receive clear guidance from their father regarding Islamic faith and manners. What should we do for our nephews and nieces?

Answer

It is encouraging to receive such a question, indicating the concern of those sisters for their nieces and nephews. May Allah *SWT* reward them for their wonderful spirit of trying to save these Muslim children and making sure they grow up to be strong confident Muslims who observe and practice their *deen*.

There is no doubt that the role of parents is very crucial in their children's lives. Parents represent the first circle that children will encounter in their environment, and children's personalities are formed according to how their parents deal with them. The Prophet *SAAW* clearly indicated this to us in his saying:

> "All babies are born with a pure nature, and it is their parents who can change that nature and make them Jews, Christians or fire worshippers."[16]

Because of this great influence that parents have on their children, some scholars made marriage to women from the People of the Book

[16] Al Bukhary, Musllim, and Others

conditional upon the family's living in a Muslim-majority society [17] to ensure that the children grow up as Muslims. Our situation in North America, where Muslims live as a minority, is different. Thus, when a Muslim man chooses to marry from among the People of the Book, he should take all precautions to ensure that his children from this marriage will be raised as Muslims. In addition to including this as part of the marriage contract with his non-Muslim wife, he must make sure that he will provide his children with all the guidance and proper support mechanisms necessary for the children's Islamic development. Parenting in North America is a huge challenge even when both parents are Muslim. It is an even greater challenge when one of them is not.

The following are some suggestions for those sisters:

• Remember that you have no control over your brother or his family. However, you may gently advise and offer subtle suggestions without being too direct or at all harsh. Do not let your genuine concern about the future of your nephews and nieces lead you to any foolish or unacceptable behavior with your sister-in-law.

• Be very kind and maintain very good relations with your brother's family. Treat your sister-in-law in the best possible way and let her see the beauty of Islam through your behavior and conduct. Remember the Qur'anic advice: "Repel (an evil) with what is best, then verily, he between whom and you there was enmity, will become as though he were a close friend,"[18] and "Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who do not fight against you on account of religion and who do not drive you out of your homes. Verily Allah loves those who deal with equity."[19]

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[17] See chapter three of *Blissful Marriage, A Practical Islamic Guide* by Drs. Ekram & M. Rida Beshir. Amana publications, 2003.
[18] (Q41, V34)
[19] (Q60, V8)

• Visit your brother's family regularly and exchange gifts with them.

• Talk to your brother in a very soft, gentle and kind way to explain to him the serious consequences for him and his children if he does not provide them with the proper guidance. Mention that you are available if he needs any help or support in this matter.

• If there is a member of the community who is well respected by your brother, you could approach that community member and explain your concerns to him. Ask him to discuss the matter with your brother. He may have more influence on your brother and be able to convince him to do the right thing regarding his children's upbringing.

• Make a lot of *du'a* to Allah *SWT*, asking Him to protect your brother's children and to open your brother's heart so that he might see the seriousness of his actions and provide his children with the Islamic teachings necessary for them to grow up with strong and confident Muslim personalities.

Q. 18

I have two boys (ages four and two). I plan to continue my studies in Canada and I am worried that the environment there will affect my children. My older child will be in school in Canada. Canadian schools do not teach religion to students. My question has two parts. How much can the children be affected by:

1. The non-Muslim teachers at school? and
2. The environment in general?

For the most part, my wife will be staying at home looking after the children. However, I am still worried about their religion and their behavior. Do you have any advice to deal with this situation?

Answer

It is quite refreshing to see that Muslims are concerned about the affairs of their children, especially when they move to a different environment.

The importance of a proper environment for raising children cannot be overemphasized. The Prophet *SAAW* indicated in one *hadith* that human beings are born in a pure state, and it is their parents who make them Jewish, Christian or Magian (fire worshippers).[20] From among the lessons derived from this hadith, scholars have pointed out the following two:

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[20] See the exact *hadith* reference in the previous question..

1. The environment has a great impact on a child's upbringing.

2. Parents represent the first circle of environments that a child will encounter. The influence of this circle is so significant that it can change a child's pure nature.

Other environmental circles that children face are school, neighbours, and friends (the local community). Mainstream society is, in general, represented in all the events surrounding children's lives as well as in the array of ideas and information that children are bombarded with via the media, particularly television.

Young children are very influenced by their teachers. They also like to imitate other children from school. If the teacher is promoting good values, this will not be a problem for your child. In the public school system in Canada, teachers generally treat children fairly, try to take care of the needs of each individual child, and help them learn. However, the teachers' own personal conduct may not agree with our Islamic value system, for example, their manner of dress.

The school environment also introduces children to many un-Islamic ideas, such as:

• Various celebrations (Thanksgiving, Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter, and so on), which seem to occur throughout the entire school year, and the whole educational program is centred on the theme of the festivity at the time.

• Classmates' behaviour (how they dress, the occasional inappropriate language they use, their general attitude, and so on).

Being aware of these dangers is a good parenting approach. It is the parents' responsibility to filter out the negative effects of this environ-

ment as part of the process of shaping the child's personality during those very important years.

Our advice is:

1. Enroll the child in a private Islamic school. Make sure you do your homework and thoroughly research the quality of education and standards of moral behavior in the school.

2. If, for any reason, an Islamic school is not the answer for you, place the child in the public school system and try to filter out the negative effects of such an environment to prevent them from reaching the child. Here are some essential techniques to apply:

a. Provide a good, warm, and cozy family environment in which everyone cares about each other. This means basing the family environment on truly Islamic values that actually represent Islam, rather than a foundation of only cultural or ethnic norms.

b. Use the true, proper Islamic methods of training for raising children[21].

c. Communicate with the children at a level they can understand and that is suitable for their age group.

d. Become actively involved at the child's school by volunteering your time as a teacher's helper during field trips and other activities.

e. Help your child participate in *show* and *tell* at their school to introduce Islamic occasions to their classmates.

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[21] Islamic libraries are full of material on proper parenting techniques. Our books on parenting, such as *Parenting in the West*, *Muslim Teens*, and *Parenting skills based on the Qur'an and Sunnah* are suited more for the North American environment. See the complete reference of these books in previous sections and on the reference page.

f. Become actively involved in the Muslim community, where your children will have an opportunity to meet other Muslim children of their age and feel as though they are part of a larger community.

g. Enroll your child in a part-time Islamic school that teaches Arabic and Islamic studies; for example, an after-school program or a weekend school.

h. Work with your child on learning Arabic, Qur'an and Islamic studies at a level that you are able to teach.

The above techniques should be used by parents living in countries where Muslims are a minority, regardless of whether the child is in an Islamic or a public school. An Islamic school may make your job easier because it will push your children in the same direction that you are pushing them. If the child is not in an Islamic school, you will be pushing against the mainstream. Nevertheless, children can be, and have been, successfully raised in both situations.

Q. 19

I am a mother of two children who are seven and twelve years old. We live in an area where there are not many Muslim families nearby. My children want to visit their non-Muslim friends in their homes. Do you think it is a good idea for me to let them do this? Please advise me what to do.

Answer

The need for friends and acquaintances is natural for children. Parents should acknowledge this need and try to satisfy it to the best of their ability. They should also teach their children the proper criteria for selecting friends. It was reported by Abu Hurairah *RAA* that the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said: "A man follows the religion of his closest friend, so each one should consider whom he makes his friend."[22] In another narration, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari *RAA* heard the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* saying: "Good company and bad company are like the owner of musk and the iron smith. The owner of the musk will either offer you some musk free of charge, or you will buy it from him or smell its pleasant odour. As for the iron smith, either he will burn your clothes, or you will have to smell the repugnant smell of the iron."[23]

It is recommended that parents satisfy their children's need for friends by making them befriend other Muslim children of the same age, even if this means enduring some inconveniences, such as driving to the other side of the city. If this is absolutely unattainable, there are a few important points you must take into consideration before allowing them to visit non-Muslim friends in their homes. These are:

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[22] Muslim
[23] Agreed upon

* Make sure that the effect of those friends on your children is going to be positive.

* Make sure that the environment at their home is safe; the safety of your children should never be compromised. For example, from the physical safety point of view, the kids aren't allowed to play with knives, sharp objects, or swim in a pool unsupervised. As from the moral safety point of view, the kids aren't allowed to watch T.V. unsupervised or smoke cigarettes as well as the parents are not just sitting around drinking beer. As a mother, you could visit this family, get to know them and have an idea about their home environment before allowing your child to visit their home.

* Ensure that one of the parents is going to be home during the visit. If your children are girls, make sure that the mother is home and that no boys are in the house while your girls are visiting. If your children are boys, make sure that either the father or the mother is home during the visit.

* Give your children clear instructions about what they should be careful of during the visit. Tell them that, if they ever feel uncomfortable at any time for any reason, they should call you right away to have you pick them up.

* Be on the lookout for any change in your child's behavior after such visits to make sure that the visits are not having a negative impact on your child. This will prevent you from having to work hard to reverse any negative effects.

* If you feel that any of the above criteria are not met or that the safety of your child may be compromised, it might be a better idea to host your child's friends at your house.

If the above criteria are not met, and you decide not to allow your children to visit their friends at their homes, make sure that you clearly explain to your children the reasons why you made such a decision. Safety should come at the top of your explanation list, and you should acknowledge your children's need to be with their friends.

Q. 20

As parents, how can we counter the hundreds of messages coming to our children from schools, the media and society concerning un-Islamic values?

Answer

The first issue is that the environment can have very detrimental effects on our efforts to raise our children. The Prophet *SAAW* stated that all babies are born with a pure nature, and it is their parents (the first circle of environments) who can change this nature and make them either Jewish, Christian, or fire worshippers. This shows how influential the environment is on our children.

Parents represent the first circle of environments that our children are subjected to. In North America, schools and society at large represent another circle affecting our children. Most of the time, the messages they receive from their peers at school and from the media are against Islamic values. Parents have a role in ensuring a proper environment and providing a support system for their children to help them counter these un-Islamic messages. Therefore, if your child is in a public school, you should always try to visit the school to inform the school administration about the needs of Muslim children: make them aware of various Islamic occasions such as *Ramadan* and *Eid*, as well as their dietary requirements. Parents can also participate with their children in classroom activities such as show and tell, which will give them an opportunity to correct some misconceptions about Islam. You could arrange information displays about Islam, in an open house format, for example. For this to be effective, parents should occasionally volunteer for school activities.

Other things you can do is to organize camps for Muslim youth where they can live Islam with other Muslim children.

Before children will be willing to listen, parents must have a very good relationship with them. Basically, it is best not to be critical. Instead, be encouraging with the children and be involved in their lives and activities, whether at home or in the community. Whenever they are getting a different message from outside, express your love to them and explain the wisdom behind your objections to that message. And be happy when they come to you with questions.

Q. 21

How can I find good children's magazines, books, and colouring books that have an Islamic theme?

Answer The best way to find these is to attend some of the national conventions and go to their bazaars.

- The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) convention takes place every year in September, on Labor Day weekend.

- The Muslim American Society (MAS) and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) together hold two conventions annually, one on the Fourth of July weekend and the other during the Christmas holidays in December.

Another way is to visit the following Websites, which have good educational material for children:

- ISNA's Media Mall: www.isna.com
- Noor Art: www.noorart.com
- Astrolabe: www.astrolabe.com
- Multivisions Extra Inc.: www.multivisionsinc.com
- SoundVision: www.soundvision.com
- Amana Publications: www.amana-publications.com
- Muslim American Society Council of Islamic Schools (MAS CIS): www.masnet.org/school.asp
- International Board of Educational Research and Resources (IBERR) at http://www.iberr.org/

Q.22

After they get married, do children have to live in their parents' home if that is what the parents wish? Can they move out but still maintain a close relationship?

Answer

Children have to provide good company to their parents, look after them, and try to make their parents pleased with them. Children are also entitled to their own lives. These two sets of rights and responsibilities must be balanced, and this can be done in different ways.

One way is for the children to live nearby but keep in touch with the parents to make sure all their needs are fulfilled. As the child in this situation, if you move out, be gentle with the move, reassure your parents that you love them, that you are going to be part of their lives, and be patient with them as they adjust to the idea.

Q. 23

Do you advise Muslims to enroll their children in non-Muslim activities such as soccer and baseball leagues in the city?

Answer It is very important for children to be involved in various activities and to live an active lifestyle, which may include sports or being with other children. The best solution is for parents to provide these activities for their children in an Islamic environment, particularly when the children are still vulnerable and in the early stages of development.

In cases where this is not possible, parents may research activities run by non-Muslim groups. If your research indicates that the behavior and language used by the non-Muslim children is appropriate and decent, there is no harm in allowing your children to participate in those activities. An exception would be if the activity is co-ed and the children are in their pre-teen (nine years old and up) and teenage years.

While your children are participating in these activities, you should monitor and assess any changes in their behavior. If you notice that these changes are negative, then you should try to modify this behavior through discussion and explanation. If this negative behavior persists, you should consider withdrawing the child from these activities if they are the cause of the problem.

Before each activity session with the non-Muslims, you should encourage your children to observe Islamic behavior during their interaction with non-Muslims, such as wearing proper attire, doing their prayers during breaks, and conducting themselves with appropriate Islamic manners. Remind them that Allah *SWT* will reward them for their efforts and for being good models of Islam in front of non-Muslims.

Q.24

How important is it to expose toddlers to other children who are their age or older? What should parents do if they sense that their children are picking up bad habits from other children?

Answer

It is important for a toddler to be exposed to other children. This is even more important if the child is the first born or does not have siblings close to his age. When children associate and interact with children of the same age, or nearly the same age, they have the opportunity to learn important social skills. If they are not given this opportunity at an early age, they may not sufficiently develop their social skills. When children play or even fight with each other they are acquiring negotiation skills that are essential for their social well-being. If they are not exposed to challenges at an early age, they may fail to conduct themselves in a proper and socially effective manner when they eventually go to school or interact with other children later.

As for your second question, parents are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of their children. If they leave them with someone, they should ensure that the environment is safe. With respect to toddlers interacting with other toddlers and picking up bad habits, we see that these bad habits are usually nothing worse than hitting, using inappropriate language, or being wild and unruly. None of these habits or behaviours are serious enough in toddlers to stop parents from letting their children interact with others.

If there are other toddlers whom your child can interact with as an alternative, you should have your child play with them instead. But if there is no satisfactory alternative in terms of other toddlers or children, you should not deny your child the chance to interact with other children; it is more important for them to develop socially through interaction. If your child is picking up bad habits from other children you should tell your child firmly that such behaviours are unacceptable.

How you communicate this message is as important as the message itself. Therefore, when you tell your child to stop an unacceptable behavior, you should be completely free from doing other tasks while you communicate this message to your child. Moreover, it is important to stop the child immediately, face her and give her your full attention while communicating that message to her.

Another way to get rid of bad habits is to read through children's books that deal with moral behavior, or to make up a story that deals with that particular bad habit. When the child repeats a bad habit, it is important for the parent to remind her of the character in the story (refer to chapter four of our book entitled *Parenting in the West* for details on how to use stories to correct bad habits; and the recently published book by Hoda Beshir, *Parenting through Storytelling*). In addition, if the child engages in bad behavior, she should be made to feel the natural consequences of that behavior by being deprived of the activity she was doing or with a timeout.

Q.25

These days, in which Muslims are the object of suspicion, especially here in the U.S., how can we convince our children that racism and prejudice are wrong, particularly when they hear insults and bad things about Muslims at school?

Answer Being a Muslim means that we should act Islamically under all circumstances and be role models of goodness despite any injustices perpetrated against us. This is obvious in the case of the Prophet *SAAW* and his companions in the challenges they faced from the non-believers. One example of this conduct is when a Muslim family (Aal-Yasir) was being physically tortured. Whenever the Prophet *SAAW* passed by them, he would urge them to be patient.

When our children interact with people from Western cultures or at school, they must be encouraged to continue acting according to Islamic values and not to resort to foolish behaviour if they are unfairly provoked by others. However, we do not mean that our Muslim children should be passive, but rather that they should accept the challenge they are faced with and try to correct the problem through constructive means, such as discussion. By acting in this manner, they will incur the support of Allah *SWT* and bring about changes in the people around them, even though it may take time to see the results.

Parents should play an active role in supporting their children by talking with the school administration and presenting the Islamic stance on

issues of injustice and racism through interactive sessions with the school community. Parents should explain to their children that not all Americans support this negative attitude. You can expose your children to a more positive side of American culture by having them interact with more friendly and supportive Americans and by showing them news articles, such as those found in *The Guardian* of UK and at http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardian and *The Independent* also of UK at http://news.independent.co.uk/ The articles written by Robert Fisk as well as articles in the Orlando centennial could also be of great help. The Islamic circle of North America website (ICNA) has a great collection of these articles at http://www.icna.com/

For more positive news articles please, also check www.isna.net, and www.masnet.org. You should expose your children to opinion polls indicating that a large percentage of Americans are against these types of injustice and prejudice. This way, the children will see that the situation is not as bleak as it seems.

Q. 26

How do we balance the need to live an Islamic lifestyle with the need to interact in Canadian society?

Answer For parents to balance an Islamic personality with interactions in mainstream, non-Muslim, Canadian society, they must raise their children to have a strong Islamic identity and self-confidence. This way, the children will find it possible to mix with non-Muslims and excuse themselves when an un-Islamic act is taking place. For example, if a child is at recess at school and hears his friends saying swear words, he will be able to either tell them not to say those words in front of him, or he will excuse himself and leave the group temporarily. So the child will continue mixing with the non-Muslim mainstream, but whenever something un-Islamic is taking place, he will put his Islamic identity ahead of being with his friends. That takes self-confidence from the child's side and a very close relationship with his parents. A close relationship means that the parents sit with the child, listen to what went on during the day when he was out, and provide him with comfort and support.

As an alternative, parents can also provide Muslim groups where he can mix more with children of his own age who share the same Islamic values. Plenty of practical tips on how parents can make sure that their children grow up with strong Islamic confidence can be found in chapter one of the book entitled *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West*, and chapter four of the book entitled *Muslim Teens*.[24]

[24] See details in the reference section at the end.

Q.27

We are new Muslims, having converted just 3 1/2 months ago, and I am having difficulty in finding a balance to prevent our children from regretting their own choice to convert. My daughter has just entered junior high and she proudly started wearing the hijab to school even though she is only 12. She met some girls who were raised as Muslims since birth, and they do not wear the hijab. My question is, how can I encourage my daughter to wear her hijab when the girls who were raised as Muslims do not? Now she does not wear it and she wants to attend school dances with them at night. I will not permit this because I think she is too young to attend dances at night, but they only remain too young for a period of time. What should I do?

Answer

We commend this sister for making the right decision and trying to make her children adhere to Islamic values.

As for how to help your children follow Islamic rules, keep searching for families who are committed to Islam and who apply its rules, even if their children do not attend your daughter's school. You could meet such families through the mosque in your town or city, or even through Islamic conferences. If you meet families who are committed to Islam, help your children make friends with their children by staying in touch with them, either on a weekly basis if they live in the same city or on a yearly basis if you meet them through conferences. Of course, they can e-mail each other and share their experiences.

Explain to your children that not all Muslims are fully dedicated to Islam, but that you would like them to be around those who are because those are the people of Paradise *insha'a Allah*. Getting your children to participate in youth groups in your area and attend Islamic camps during summer vacation and winter break would also help tremendously.

Keep a close relationship between you and your children; listen to the reasons they give for why they want to go to the dances. Explain to them that dances are not going to help them be good people, and that Allah *SWT* has a much better reward for them in Paradise. Keep working on it and do not feel insecure if their pain does not go away quickly, as long as you are reassuring them and doing the abovementioned things.

A twelve year old is at the beginning of adolescence, and the most important thing for her is the approval of her peers. As a mother, you should do some reading to understand the changes that take place during adolescence and how to treat her Islamically. This will be of great help in dealing with the problem. Detailed information can be found in our book entitled *Muslim Teens*.

Schooling

Q. 28

How do you deal with dating problems in high schools? Is there any possibility of handling the problem as a mother or as a teacher? I am both.

Answer For Muslim teens who are attending high school surrounded by fellow students who are dating and attending dances, it is very difficult to be different and not do what everyone else is doing. The Muslim youth need to be involved in other groups of people their own age who are living by the rules of the Islamic value system. They can do this by attending camps and youth groups on a regular basis and by maintaining a close relationship with an adult in their life, preferably their parents or the youth group leader. They also need to participate in activities such as hiking, nature trips, sports, and so on.

Therefore, as a teacher and mother, you can ensure that such a youth group exists in your area. Perhaps you can lead one or facilitate the formation of one.

Dialogue with your teens in a very calm and loving way about the dangerous situation that Muslims can get into because of dating. Do this in a way that touches their hearts, as the Prophet *SAAW* did with the young man who had asked him permission to fornicate. Have an open heart, listen, dialogue and suspend your judgment when you deal with this age group.

Give the teens explanations and ask them: "What is the purpose of dating during the teenage years?" The purpose of a man and a woman getting to know each other should be marriage. Since teenagers are still very young, there is really no purpose for them to start this so early. When youth start

dating, many times they end up having a baby, and that baby will likely grow up without one of his or her parents. This is not fair to the baby, and no one should allow this to happen. When people are ready for marriage and can accept the responsibilities of it, such as supporting themselves financially and being able to care for their children, only then can they start pursuing marriage in the proper way.

My question is regarding school for young children. Do you think it is a good idea to put children in a preschool program starting when they are two and a half years old, or is it better for them to stay with their mother until they are a little older? What do you believe is better for their psychological and mental development? I do take my daughter to group programs in the community so she can interact with other children, but I want to know if her going to school alone in a more structured setting is a good idea?

Answer

For now, it is good to take your two-and-a-half-year-old daughter to a playgroup twice or more a week so she can interact with other children in the presence and safety of her mother.

Starting when she is three years old, taking her for half a day of school two to three times a week is also a good idea. She will learn how to interact with other children, how to manage on her own, and how to make the necessary adjustments early in her life. However, it is important to emphasize the following points:

• Two to three times a week is sufficient for children this age. Do not overdo it by sending the child every day.

• Mother has to follow up regularly and stay closely in touch with the school. Perhaps she can do this by volunteering frequently and listening attentively to the child's message about her experience at school. This will put the mother in a better position to evaluate the school environment and make sure that the school activities are meeting her child's needs. Also, by being closely in touch with the school, the mother can explain things to the child that the child might otherwise misinterpret, as well as encourage and support her daughter in areas of weakness that she might discover.

Q. 30

Our young daughters in middle and high school are faced with a conflict between the school culture and what we require from them to keep the character of modesty and decency and to act upon it. In the school culture, they are trained to express their point of view and be assertive. They also feel the pressure of wanting to be like everybody else in how they dress and present themselves. However, we are teaching them to practice hayaa' and dress modestly according to the Islamic dress code. None of them want to wear jilbabs or skirts while going to middle or high school. If they cannot wear tight blouses and stretch pants, they would go for very baggy pants and shirts. How can I get my daughter to dress Islamically, conduct herself modestly, and still survive the peer pressure during middle and high school?

Answer

This question addresses two main issues, namely, the issue of *hayaa'*, and the issue of peer pressure on Muslim teens in middle school and high school.

First, let us try to clarify the meaning and implications of *hayaa'*. This word encompasses modesty, decency, bashfulness and healthy shyness. We use the Arabic word *hayaa'* because no single word in the English language is equivalent to this Islamic term. *Hayaa'* is an important character in Islam, as indicated by the Prophet *SAAW*, who said: "For every deen, there is a predominant character, and the predominant character of Islam is *hayaa'*."[25] It means that people should shy away from doing anything that is indecent, and always conduct themselves in a modest manner. The highest level of *hayaa'* is *hayaa'* from Allah *SWT*, in which a person is always careful that Allah *SWT* never sees him doing something that may displease Allah *SWT*, to the extent that the person's

[25] Malik

tastes, likings and dislikings are defined by what pleases Allah *SWT*. This can only be achieved through striving and exerting effort to improve one's relationship with Allah *SWT*. By building such a high level of *hayaa'* from Allah *SWT* and by following the great *fiqhi* rule of *choosing the lesser of two evils*, parents can help their children and teenagers ultimately adhere to Islamic values, one of which is dressing modestly.

Choosing the lesser of two evils is a great rule in Islamic jurisprudence, deduced by scholars from the practices of the Prophet *SAAW* and from the teachings of the Qur'an. This rule should be understood properly and used and applied wisely by parents in the North American environment. We have come across many cases in which committed Muslim parents miserably failed to use this rule and ended up driving their children away from Islam. Some of those children became completely lost to mainstream North American society, while others are at an unacceptable level of Islamic commitment and practice. We have also come across parents who were wise enough to use this rule properly and, with the help of Allah *SWT*, protected their children from deviating from Islam. Most of those children are at a very good level of commitment to Islam and are very good, practicing Muslims now *alhamdulillah*. Let us illustrate what we mean by the following example, which is specifically related to the issue of clothing:

When it comes time for a young woman to wear *hijab*, some parents insist that she wear long, loose dresses (*jilbabs*) or skirts and a long *khimar* right away. While this may be closer to the full *hijab*, it is often an extreme change for the young woman to make, and she may not feel ready for it. In some cases we have seen, this has caused the young woman to completely deviate from Islam, which is clearly the greater harm. In other cases, the parents see that the daughter does not feel ready to make a complete change, and they allow her to start by wearing loose pants and loose, long-sleeved shirts with her headscarf. While this is the minimum for *hijab*, it is better that the young woman starts off gradually and make the change to looser clothing when she is ready. This way, we have avoided the greater harm of deviation by allowing the lesser harm of a temporary, lower level of *hijab*. While the young woman is in this first stage of wearing *hijab*, the parents should help her strengthen her belief so that she may eventually feel ready to move up to the next level.

Following this principle will help teens feel that Islam makes sense and does not enforce or impose things on people without preparing them to take on huge responsibilities. This will increase your teenager's commitment to Islam, from the level of knowledge to the level of complete conviction that it is the right way to follow *insha'a Allah*.

Q. 31

I am a teacher at an Islamic school. It happens that my son, who is in second grade, is a student in my classroom this year. I am having trouble with this situation because he often breaks the rules. I expect him to follow the class rules, and I follow up by applying the consequences on him when he breaks them. However, he continues to break the rules. What would you suggest that I do?

Answer Your son probably feels awkward about having his mother as his teacher. In the school environment, where your attention is distributed among all the children in class, your son might feel insecure and try to get your undivided attention with what seems to be misbehaviour.

We suggest that you talk to your son openly at home to assure him that your role as his mother is solid and firm. You can start a conversation by asking him: "What is it like for you at school this year? I feel awkward being your teacher. You know, sometimes, I feel like I want to hug you and kiss you right in the middle of the classroom. Then, I remember, 'Oh, no, I'm your teacher now.' I tell myself, 'I'll wait until we go home and then I'll give you a big hug.' You know, I love you so much. I know you are a good boy and you are also a good student. Come now and give me a big hug and let us prepare dinner together."

The next morning, on your way to school, talk with your son again, saying something like: "Let us have our little secret. You and I are going to remember to follow the rules at school today and we will cook dinner together again when we go home. You helped me so much yesterday. Don't tell anybody about our little secret."

Your son will always need your assurance and follow-up through the school year, because the situation is not easy on him. The two roles you are playing, mother and teacher at the same time, can be very confusing for him.

We are glad that you enforce the rules and expect your son to follow them. This is a healthy attitude, unlike that of other teachers who would favour their son in the classroom with extra attention, because they themselves are confused between their roles as mother and teacher.

Q. 32

What is the best way for us to follow up on our child's homework? Sometimes we are very busy and do not have any time to do this. Do you have any suggestions?

Answer

Parents can make an agreement with their child that the child can complete her homework every night and show it to her parents by a certain time in the evening, and that if she needs help, she must ask for it. This agreement will include either a follow-up chart, for younger children, or a contract between the parent and child, for older children and teenagers. Using the chart, the parent and child will decide what reward(s) the child will receive if she sticks to the agreement, or what consequences she will have or privileges she will lose if she breaks the agreement. The parents still have to follow up with the child, but this will make it easier than simply telling her to do her homework.

A follow-up chart works better for children in grades one through five, and a contract works better for children in grades six and up. A detailed sample on how to prepare a contract between you and your child can be found in chapter nine of our book entitled Muslim Teens, published by Amana Publications.

Q. 33

Is it safe to send our children to a public school in junior high?

Answer We cannot say that it is safe for parents to send their children to junior high school without taking certain precautions. Parents must be very involved, and if there is an Islamic junior high in the area, it is better to send them there.

If there is no Islamic junior high school in your area, and you have to send your child to a public school, it is very important that you research the situation thoroughly. Visit the school and learn about the environment of the school as much as you can, because some schools are safer than others, depending on where you live.

After doing your research, if you decide to send your child to a public school, you need to maintain a close relationship with your child so that you remain aware of what is going on at school and can compensate for the negative aspects by instilling good Islamic values in him. You can do this by enrolling him in Islamic camps, weekend religious schools, and positive youth group activities, such as balanced study circles and sports teams in your community.

Q. 34

During a life dialogue on www.masnet.org, in one of your answers, you said that some schools are safer than others. When do you describe a school as "safe"?

Answer We can easily describe a school as safe when there is no drug trafficking taking place and no violence. Also, if the school shows acceptance of cultural differences and promotes respect for everybody, then the school is safe.

However, safety alone is not reason enough for us to put our children in a public school. Parents still have a lot of work to do with their teens to ensure that they do not fully assimilate with the mainstream culture but rather intelligently integrate into it. This means that they must be strong enough to keep their Islamic identity and that they do not mind being different and distinguished from the mainstream.

Q. 35

Recently I followed one of your life dialogues on www.masorg.net and I felt that you do not recommend the public school system. Do you mean that schools in the West have some problems that may affect our Muslim families here?

Answer Yes, public schools in the West have some problems, mainly related to the environment and the popular, mainstream culture of this society. This is normal for all minority groups who have a different value system.

Some of these problems can be related to celebrations such as Christmas, Halloween and Valentine's Day. Others could be regarding relations between the genders, school dances, private parties, boyfriend and girlfriend issues and clothing. In chapter three of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective*, which is dedicated to discussing how the environment affects our children, we describe these problems in detail and suggest ways to avoid the negative effects that these problems can have on our children. Additional information on the problems facing Muslim teens in the public school system can also be found in our book entitled *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope*.

Q. 36

As a mother, I am going to be living in the U.S. for a short period of time, just one year. My daughter is at the age that she will be attending her first preschool. Would sending her to a public school have a negative effect on her identity and language acquisition?

Answer If you are staying in the U.S. for only one year, and you, as the mother, can become involved a little bit at your daughter's school, there should be no harm to her identity or language acquisition. This is assuming that you will also address issues such as Christmas and Halloween, explain to the child that these holidays are not Islamic and that we do not celebrate them, and make Eid the real celebration.[26]

[26] See the section on celebrations later in this book for details on how Muslim parents can deal with various Western celebrations.

Islamic Identity

Q.37

Asalamu alaykum. I am a newly practicing sister. I have a 14-month-old baby boy and would like to raise him Islamically. Can you please recommend a book or Website that covers how I should raise my child at this young age and deal with all the dilemmas that arise with a 14-month-old baby?

Also, what is your view on children watching cartoons in English, and where can I obtain Islamic cartoons?

My last question is about your thoughts on young children and computers, from an Islamic perspective. I am completing a dissertation that involves looking at software for toddlers and gender differences. For this dissertation, I will be creating software applications for children. I would like to produce a package that teaches Islam to young children. What is the Islamic view of children and computers? I have asked a lot of questions. I hope you can answer them for me.

Answer

Wa alaykum asalaam, Sister. First, we would like to congratulate you for practicing the *deen*. We ask that Allah *SWT* give you courage and patience in doing so and that He reward you with *jannah insha'a* Allah.

Your question basically consists of three parts. Let us deal with them one at a time, *insha'a* Allah.

Your first question is related to reference materials to help you raise your 14-month-old boy according to Islamic principles of parenting. For this, we can direct you to the following:

• Books entitled *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective* and *Parenting Skills Based on the Qur'an and Sunnah* by Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir, published in the U.S. by Amana publications. Although these books do not exclusively target parenting of young children, the Islamic principles and practical examples presented in the books are applicable to all ages. These books are simple, easy to read, and enhanced with many practical examples of how to apply the principles with your children. They also contain a list of good references. These books have received excellent reviews from many readers. We recommend that you check out these reviews on the www.amazon.com Website. If you are interested, you may order the books directly from the publisher, either via their Website at www.amana-publications.com or by calling (301) 595-5888.

• The *American Muslim Magazine* published by the Muslim American Society. This magazine has a wonderful family section that includes plenty of good articles on parenting according to Islam. You can access most of the issues on-line at www.masnet.org by following the *American Muslim Magazine* link.

• For answers to questions regarding this specific age group (14 months old), consult the parenting section of www.islamonline.com.

• For parenting articles in general, consult www.soundvision.com.

• Search the Internet, but be careful about the sources and screen the material you find. Try to use material written mainly by Muslim scholars.

Your second question is about our view on children watching cartoons in English, and how to obtain Islamic cartoons. Here are our views:

• Watching TV in general, and children under three years of age watching cartoons, are very sensitive and controversial issues, and neither are recommended.

• Research indicates that it is not healthy for children under three years of age to watch TV. It affects their ability to focus in later years.

• It is much better for children at this age to play with real toys than to watch images on a screen. It is also extremely important for them to spend enough time interacting with their parents.

• Non-Islamic cartoons could be watched after the age of three, provided that the parents supervise the child and make sure that the cartoon is suitable. Parents have to be very selective in what they allow their children to watch.

• Again, research indicates that a great number of non-Islamic cartoons include violence, which has very harmful effects, especially on boys, in later years of their life.

• Limited, supervised viewing is always recommended regardless of whether the cartoon is non-Islamic or Islamic.

• A variety of Islamic cartoons and children's videos are currently available through many Websites, such as:

– www.soundvision.com
– www.isna.net [Check the media mall]
– www.astrolabe.com
– www.icna.com

Most of these Websites belong to Islamic producers or organizations located mainly in North America. They may also have representatives carrying their products in Europe. One European name that comes to mind is "The Islamic Foundations of UK."

Your third question is about children using computers. Here is what we think:

• Computers and TV are merely tools. They are not prohibited in and of themselves. They can be used for either a good cause or a bad cause. How they are used is what determines whether they are prohibited or allowed. Islam provides proper guidelines that should be followed, even for permissible and allowed matters. Here are some of the key guidelines:

– The material presented (programs, in the case of TV, and software applications, in the case of computers) should be Islamically acceptable and suitable.

– Even material that is allowed should not be used excessively and should not waste the user's time or divert attention from more important matters, such as personal well-being and proper Islamic development.

• Having said this, we think that using computers by following the above guidelines is much better for children than watching TV. While using a computer application, the child must interact with it regularly for the application to work. This is stimulating and can support the child's development, unlike TV programs, which do not require the child to interact at all and therefore leave the child completely passive.

• Children can start using computers with the appropriate software programs when they are as young as two years old.

• It would be wonderful if you could produce a software package such as the one you mentioned. Islamic libraries for children are in great need of such products. This kind of package would certainly help the new Muslim generation living in the West. It would serve a very important purpose. It is a great project and we hope you can get all the help you need from all dedicated Muslims. Some of the Websites we mentioned above also produce Islamic software for children.

Q. 38

My friend and I had a discussion about praising children. I believe that it is healthy to frequently give positive remarks to children, while she believes that doing this spoils children and makes them arrogant and full of themselves. Can you please advise us on this matter? Jazakum Allahu Khayran.

Answer

Jazakum Allahu Khayran, Sister, for asking this question. This discussion is very common among Muslim parents, and your question has been raised several times during our Positive Parenting Skills workshops.

Actually, both of you hold part of the truth. The full truth and the proper way of dealing with this matter are a combination. In addition to certain precautions that should be taken and observed by parents to prevent children from becoming arrogant due to continuous praise, we have some suggestions about what parents can do to properly give their children positive reinforcement.

• It is better to make positive comments on a regular basis specifically in reaction to something good that the child has done (for example, good behaviour) rather than praise the child all the time for no reason. For example, if your son is helping his sister with her homework, you can say: "*Masha'a* Allah. I like this. You are a helpful person and Allah *SWT* will reward you for your good deed, *insha'a* Allah." Or when your six-year-old daughter is dressed in new clothes you could say: "That looks nice on you." These are positive comments that make our children feel good, and it is recommended that every parent make such encouraging comments to their children. On the other hand, when parents

repeatedly praise their children with comments such as: "You are so beautiful," or "You are the best child in the family," this could make the children become full of themselves and could promote arrogance in their personality.

• At the same time, parents should teach and train their children to be responsible. They should not accept misbehaviour, which should be dealt with promptly using the "Indicate, Educate and Train" techniques, which are described in detail in a previous chapter entitled "Correcting Behaviour."[27]

• Parents should remind their children that, whenever we are blessed with certain talents, we should be grateful to Allah *SWT*. This way, our good deeds will be accepted, and we will be rewarded for using our talents to perform any deed or to act in any way that is in line with Islamic values.

• Parents must also teach their children the virtues of being modest and humble. The stories of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* are the most beautiful tools to help our children realize the importance of these wonderful qualities.

Following the above tips could *insha'a* Allah help us make our children feel good when they are being praised for their positive actions, and simultaneously ensure that they do not become arrogant or full of themselves.

[27] Dr. Ekram and Dr. M Rida Beshir *Positive Parenting Skills based on the Qur'an and Sunnah*. Amana publications, 2004.

Q. 39

I have a three-and-a-half-year-old boy and I am starting to tell him about Allah. I tell him that we pray to thank Allah for all the good things He gives us. Two days ago, my son had a nightmare so I told him that, if we read the Qur'an together before sleeping, he will be protected from the animals that bite him in his nightmare. My husband thinks it is too early to tell him all that. I would like my husband to read something to convince him that it is not too early, as long as I am not mentioning hell or devils or anything like that. I would appreciate your help.

Answer

It is never too early to teach our children about Allah because the Prophet *SAAW* asked us to start doing this from day one by giving the *adhan* (the call to prayer) in their right ear and the *iqamah* (the call to start the prayer) in their left ear as soon as they are born. The very first words they should hear are about Allah *SWT*. This should continue throughout the development of the child.

When we teach our children about Allah *SWT* as the Creator, the One who provides for us and the One who protects us, these concepts become ingrained in the children's psyche and become an integral part of their personality and belief. Therefore, we have every reason to teach our children about Allah *SWT* from a very early age. Although there is no specific *hadith* or injunction that we can think of right now in regards to teaching toddlers about evil things, we have been advised by the Prophet *SAAW* that we should do the *ruqqiyah* for everyone, including newborn babies, to protect them from evil things. Part of ruqqiyah is to read the last three surahs of the Qur'an, which include seeking refuge in Allah *SWT* from evil forces and *shaytan*.

Another piece of advice is that, whenever parents talk to their children about Allah *SWT*, they must put more emphasis on the compassionate attributes of Allah *SWT*, such as mercy, kindness, gentleness and forgiveness, particularly with very young children. This does not mean that we do not tell them about Allah's punishment for those who do evil, but we do not dwell on it when the children are very young. When this punishment is mentioned, it should be mentioned in an indirect way, by talking about someone else who has been deprived of the mercy of Allah *SWT*.

Furthermore, at bedtime we should spend some time with our children in a playful way, read them nice stories and avoid speaking about evil things. In regards to your son's nightmares, you could say: "We are going to read the Qur'an, and *insha'a* Allah you will see nice beautiful dreams" instead of talking specifically about protection from the animals that will bite him.

Q. 40

I read in one of your books that providing an active lifestyle is very important to our children's and teenagers' love for Islam. In our community, we do not have many activities to attract youth and teens. What should we do?

Answer

Yes, providing active lifestyle for our children and youth is a very important part of their healthy and balanced development. Ensuring that activities are available is the responsibility of parents and concerned community members. There is no excuse whatsoever for not providing activities for our children and youth. Failure to do this may have a detrimental effect on their lives when they grow older. An active lifestyle should include their lives at home, the lives within the community, and their lives among mainstream society.

• At home, parents should always have a balanced schedule to allow th children to enjoy certain games and activities in addition to carrying ou duties and chores. Family outings, picnics, playing on the play stru at the park, and registering for swimming classes are a small sa the kind of activities that families can do together.

• Community and Islamic centres should, through their youth co and departments, organize activities such as sports competitions basketball, and so on). Organized and structured activities are ot help to teens and youth. If the community is small or unable to organiz activities on its own, the following can be done:

– Individuals and families should use facilities that already exist in the community, especially when the children are young. In addition, we should not feel shy about using community facilities

that are run by non-Muslims because we are also part of this society, and as tax-paying members of our communities, we should also utilize the facilities available to us.

– Muslim sisters or Muslim brothers can reserve community facilities as a group. Such groups must follow the rules and can also enjoy using such facilities without violating any Islamic principles.

– Parents can get together and start their own activities.

Sex Education

I am a father of three children, ages five, three and two. My wife and I are doing our best to raise our children in a balanced Islamic way. Could you tell us what is the appropriate age at which parents should start talking to and educating their children about sex?

Answer

Jazakum Allah Khayran for realizing the importance of raising your children based on proper knowledge and also for being aware that, once your children are ready to receive a certain training, you must provide them with such training in the best possible way. This is commendable.

Educating children about sex is a very gradual and long process. It starts from a very young age and takes various paths. It also requires wisdom from the parents in order to prepare the children and put them in the right mind set for when they reach puberty, at which time they will require a more direct approach to sex education.

For children aged two, three and five, sex education will mainly take the form of training to develop the character of *hayaa'* (modesty, healthy balanced shyness, and decency). For Muslims, it is very important to have a character of *hayaa'* to the extent that the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said: "For every *deen* there is a core character that distinguishes it, and the core character of Islam is *hayaa'*."[28] Here are some practices that will give you an idea of how to train young children to acquire a character of *hayaa'*:

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[28] *Al-Isaba*, Version 1.06

• Parents must not let toddlers walk around the house without a diaper. When changing a child's diaper, some parents may unintentionally leave the child without a diaper for some time because they did not have everything ready before starting the process. The child might run around while the parent is busy gathering the rest of the changing gear. Sometimes parents make the mistake of laughing at the child's behaviour, which may look cute. To avoid such a situation, gather everything you need to change the child's diaper and to clean the child before you remove her diaper or underwear. When preparing the child for a bath, do not let her walk around the house naked on her way to the bathroom. If you decide to take off the child's clothes in her room, cover her with a towel and remove the towel in the bathroom.

• When children reach the age of four, parents should start teaching them about the concept of awrah and covering the private parts of the body. Parents should also instruct and train them that when they are using the washroom they should not allow others (friends or anybody) to enter the washroom with them. They should explain to the children that if they need help in the bathroom, only parents or the person looking after them with the permission of their parents can enter the bathroom with them.

• At the age of four, children should also be instructed to knock on the door before entering a room whenever the door is closed. As the children get older, parents need to emphasize this behaviour more.

• Around the age of five or six, children begin to be aware of gender differences. At that age, boys prefer to play with boys and girls prefer to play with girls. This is a suitable time to start teaching children about avoiding close physical contact, such as hugging and kissing, with the other gender. Also at this age, children should start wearing reasonably decent clothing. Skin-tight and very revealing clothing should be avoided for both boys and girls. (We do not mean that girls should be wearing *hijab* at this age).

• Later, when children are around the age of seven, it is always recommended that swimsuits be chosen to promote the character of *hayaa'* in the child. For example, boys should avoid very short or tight swimming trunks. Parents should encourage them to wear loose and long shorts. Girls should be encouraged to wear T-shirts and shorts over their swimsuits.

• In addition to following the above tips, parents must ensure that the family observes Islamic manners in the home environment in terms of the TV programs they watch and the language used by the parents and older siblings. Remember that role modeling is the best method of parenting.

My son is six years old. He is a nice, well-behaved boy, but sometimes he asks embarrassing questions that I do not know how to handle. Here are a couple of questions he asked lately:

1. Where did I come from?
2. Mom and Dad, do you kiss every night?

Could you please advise me on how to answer these questions to a six year old?

Answer

Jazak Allah Khayran for your question. Children start asking questions very early in their lives. Learning to handle these questions properly will prepare parents to educate their children in all life matters. Gender relations and the appropriateness of different acts at different times and in different situations (such as what is appropriate for married people and what is appropriate for unmarried people) is one area where children can learn a lot based on our answers to their questions. Children need to be taught that there is a right time and right conditions for every human action, and if the time and conditions are right, the action is right and beautiful. However, if the time or conditions are not right, the same action can be wrong and ugly.

As parents, we must realize that answering a child's questions is very important for building trust and good communication between us. Reprimanding children for asking questions, or trying to escape from answering them, will send the message that it is wrong to ask questions to their parents, which will push them away and drive them to find answers from other sources. If parents let this happen, they lose a great

opportunity to teach their children their values. Parents should always welcome their children's questions and tell their children that they can approach them with any questions or concerns that they have at any time. There is no such thing as embarrassing or inappropriate questions between children and their parents.

Another point for parents to consider is that when a child asks a question, he is ready to hear and learn about the subject matter of the question. By answering the question. parents are teaching their values to a child who is fully attentive and most ready to receive the answer.

Many parents feel awkward and embarrassed about some of their children's questions, which leads them to avoid answering them. As parents, we need to remind ourselves that when a child asks a question he does not know all the facts that the parents know about the subject in question. The child's question is based on certain observations he made in his environment. He is basically trying to make sense of his observations and understand the rules on which they are based. The parents' answer should be true and should only include facts that are appropriate for the child's age and ability to comprehend.

• Let us now take the example of a six year old who asks: "Where did I come from?" This is an opportunity to plant a few concepts in your child's mind, such as:

- Allah *SWT* is the Creator.
- A child is a wonderful gift to parents from Allah *SWT*, and the parents must love and care for that gift.
- *Du'a* is an important part of a Muslim's life. You can ask Allah *SWT* for whatever you want. By making *du'a*, Muslims become closer to Allah *SWT*, who likes us to make *du'a*.
- Parents must cooperate with each other.
- Children are given to married people, or marriage is a prerequisite for having children.

The answer to such a question could simply be: "Allah *SWT* created you in Mom's womb. Because Mom and Dad were very happy to get married, we kept praying to Allah *SWT* to bless us with a beautiful child who would make us even happier. Allah *SWT* answered our *du'a* and created you, first as a very tiny baby in Mom's tummy. While you were there, you kept growing and growing until you had two little hands and two little feet, two beautiful eyes, a mouth, and a nose. You had one strong heart and two strong lungs. Then there was no more room for you to grow anymore in Mom's tummy. Allah *SWT* wanted you to have more room to grow and move around, so you could use your two little hands and two little feet, so you could run and clap your hands, and so you could drink milk and say *alhamdulillah*. So Allah *SWT* made you be born, and it was your birthday. At first you cried whenever you got hungry, and your mother fed you only milk. Then you learned to eat and to talk and *masha'a* Allah you are still learning new things every day."

This sort of answer will most likely satisfy the child for some time. Th child may ask the same question again. The child might like to hear the answer several times from the parent and think the whole story is fascinating and interesting. Do not be surprised to hear the child repeating the question. Tell him the answer in an interesting story-like format that mentions a lot about the child when he was younger, stressing how dear he is to you.

If the child is searching for a more detailed answer, you will sense it in the way he is asking the question. For example he may say: "But how did it happen?" You can then answer that Allah *SWT* makes the tiny baby come out of the mother's tummy the way a chicken lays an egg. Allah *SWT* is able to make things happen. (It is beneficial to visit a farm and give the child the opportunity to watch animals and their babies. If possible, watch a chicken laying an egg. You can also look for picture storybooks about animals and their youngsters, about how their mothers or parents care for them, and about how young animals learn survival skills gradually.)

• Let us take the example of the second question: "Mom and Dad, do you kiss every night?" Many parents might feel embarrassed by such a question, thinking that the child is asking about sex related kisses, and may even get upset with the child for asking such a question. Because of this, their response may be "Don't ask such a question. That is not polite." What parents must do whenever their child asks a question is to take a moment to think about the question before they even attempt to answer it. When they do this, they will discover that any question is very innocent from the child's perspective. For example, he probably noticed that his mom or dad kisses him goodnight before he goes to bed and never saw his parents kissing each other. Naturally, this makes him wonder whether his parents kiss each other goodnight before going to bed. The answer to this question should simply be: "Yes, dear. Just as Mom and Dad kiss you goodnight, we kiss each other goodnight, too. We are a loving family. Mom and Dad love each other and we love you very much, and we all kiss each other goodnight." Answering the question in this manner will assure the child that the mother and father are on good terms, which will give him a sense of security, in case he may have overheard his parents arguing or disagreeing about something.

Again, we would like to stress that all parents should encourage their children to ask them questions. Parents must do their best to answer their children's questions because it will help build trust and good communication between them.

Q. 43

My daughter is nine years old. Is she old enough for me to talk with her about sex or is she still too young?

Answer Many girls around the age of nine start experiencing some physical changes in their bodies as they approach puberty. The girl herself will be very aware of such changes even though they may not be obvious to others. These physical changes could cause her to feel uncomfortable, confused, and insecure about what is going on with her body. At this stage, girls are likely to become oversensitive and emotional.

The age of puberty varies from one child to another. Therefore, if your nine-year-old daughter is not showing any signs of puberty, it is still a good idea to talk with her about it, since she is probably noticing that her classmates or friends are showing obvious physical changes and may be wondering about the whole matter.

It is advisable that you talk with her and discuss the following:

• Puberty is a stage in which a person goes from being a child to being an adult.

• The age of puberty varies among people, and as long as they are taking care of themselves by eating healthy and sleeping enough hours at night they should not worry about when it happens.

• There are changes associated with puberty. Parents could start by talking about some of the physical changes in one session and by talking more about it in a later session.

• There are responsibilities and obligations that come with being an adult, starting at the age of puberty. Explain that once people become adults they become accountable to Allah *SWT* for their behaviour and actions. That is why it is very important to perform prayers at the right time and correctly observe other acts of worship. It is equally important to treat parents with respect, look after their body and health, take care of their personal responsibilities, such as school, managing their time properly and making the best use of it, select good friends and be in good company, and make good use of the blessings and bounties given to them by Allah *SWT*.

We refer the reader to the next question (Question 44) for more details on how to speak with this age group about this subject.

My daughter is 12 years old. I have noticed some physical changes happening to her. I believe in an open relationship between parents and children. However, I do not know how to approach the matter of sex education and puberty with her. Please advise me on how to go about this. Thank you.

Answer

An open relationship between parents and children is an Islamic concept that is highly recommended. Parents are the keenest and most caring people when it comes to their children, and it is in the best interest of the youth that they approach their parents with any questions or concerns they may have. However, most teens do not do this and shy away from discussing their concerns with their parents or from asking them questions. One thing that parents can do to encourage their children to always seek their advice is to listen to them attentively, empathize, and show care regarding their children's concerns. Parents can then explain their point of view, clarify the matter, and offe the best solution.

When talking to teenagers about puberty and the body changes they are experiencing, parents are advised to do it in a holistic way, so that it is linked to Islamic values and morals as well as to all the corresponding responsibilities and duties. We recommend that parents bring the Qur'an in while addressing this matter and use Qur'anic verses as a basis for the discussion. They could also use *ahadith* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*) to reinforce certain concepts. A science book with clear diagrams of internal body organs could also be helpful. Such books

can be obtained from the public library, or parents can simply draw a diagram if they know how to do this. (Avoid showing diagrams of a naked person to show body parts. There is no real need for doing so and it does not reinforce the value of maintaining a high level of modesty).

If parents are already in the habit of reading Qur'an with their children and of explaining to them the general meaning of the verses they read, this practice will come in handy when it is time to discuss puberty. When a child is approaching puberty, the parent should have a private meeting with her in which they read together from the Qur'an a few relevant verses, such as chapter 40, verse 67:

> "It is He Who has created you from dust, then from a drop (of seed), then from a clot; Then he brings you forth as a child, then (ordains) that you reach the age of full strength and afterward that you become old — though some among you die before — and that you reach an appointed term, in order that you may understand."[29]

The parent should then explain the meaning of these verses and use them as an introduction to a conversation about the whole process of development and maturity. The parent should explain how Allah *SWT* created the first human being (Adam *AS*) from dust, and how Allah *SWT* creates every baby in the mothers' womb and makes the baby develop from one stage to another until the baby reaches full term. After this, the baby is born by Allah's will and progresses through life from one stage to the next until she completes her term on earth and returns to her Creator. Thus, all our energy, all our power, and all our senses are from Allah *SWT*, and at the end of our lives we return to Him.

Then the parent should mention that adolescence is one of these stages of development, which prepares humans to move from childhood to

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[29](Q40, V67)

adulthood. The parent can explain that during adolescence all of the reproductive organs in the body grow at a fast rate under the effect of the hormones produced in the body by the will of Allah *SWT*, the Creator.

You could explain to your daughter that every baby girl is born with two ovaries, which are already full of many follicles that will produce ovum (eggs), and a uterus, which will be the home for her baby in the future *insha'a* Allah. Show her how to make a fist with her hand to see the size of her uterus, which is exactly the same size. Explain that once she reaches puberty Allah *SWT* makes her body produces hormones called estrogen and progesterone. These hormones make her body change and grow a little bit at a time in order for her to mature one day and become ready to be a mother when she gets married. This process of growing includes the following:

- The ovaries produce one ovum (egg) every month.
- The uterus prepares an inner vascular layer of tissue to receive the ovum every month.
- The breasts grow so they can produce milk for a baby to feed on, when your daughter becomes ready to be a mother after she gets married.
- Hair grows in the underarms and pubic area.
- Other changes also happen that make the girl look more like a woman than a child.

Now the little girl has become a woman and she must learn to carry herself like one. *Alhamdulillah* that we have the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah to show us how to do this.

The parent will then talk with the youth about how Allah *SWT* blessed her with a healthy and able body, which she must take care of because it is a trust from Allah *SWT*. The parent will also explain that Allah *SWT* has guided us to a lifestyle that will keep us healthy, happy and good by doing only *halaal* actions and staying away from *haraam* actions.

Allah *SWT* told us very clearly that marriage is the only way for a man and woman to have physical relations. Through marriage, a man and a woman can share their lives together, take care of each other, and take care of the children that will come as a result of this marriage. Based on this, any physical relations between a girl and boy during their youth outside marriage is unlawful and is abusive to the bodies that Allah *SWT* has given to them as a trust. Those who do so are disobeying and displeasing Allah *SWT*, the One who created them in the first place and the One who can take all their power away. Such actions are wrong, and those who do it will suffer the consequences in this life as well as in the Hereafter.

With the youth, parents could also read from Surat Al-Araf (chapter 7) verses 8 to 31, explain the general meaning of the verses, emphasize all the principles mentioned in the verses, and relate these principles to the following points:

- Allah *SWT* set very clear limits for us to observe in our interactions with members of the opposite sex.
- Allah *SWT* ordered women to wear *hijab* and always act modestly.
- Allah *SWT* ordered men to act modestly, lower their gaze, dress decently and not look at girls and women as sex objects.
- Allah *SWT* taught both men and women to respect each other and keep their interactions at a decent level.

The parent could say: "You are very likely to come across girls who are dating or talking to their friends about their crushes. These kinds of actions are *haraam* and they displease Allah *SWT*." The parent could also elaborate on the harm the youth could cause to herself or to others. For example, getting pregnant and having babies that do not have a father or mother who is ready to take care of them, hurting their family, interrupting their education, destroying their future, and above all, displeasing Allah *SWT* and losing His blessings.

The parent should explain to her daughter that when she reaches puberty, her uterus will shed its inner layer every month. The mother also needs to teach her daughter proper hygienic practices and the *fiqh* of the monthly period.[30]

We would like to whisper into the ears of every parent that at this stage of life, your daughter desperately needs you. Be close to her and maintain a very good relationship with her. Be considerate of her feelings. Listen to and reason with her. Be assertive, but loving at the same time. Guide and help her to be close to Allah *SWT* because this is the only way she will be strong and able to rise above temptations.[31]

In question number 52 below, you will find further tips for addressing this issue with this age group to ensure the success of this process.

Note: The above discussions should be carried out over several sessions. Parents should use various opportunities and continue to follow up on this topic. Examples of such opportunities are:

* When the youth comes home from school and talks about incidents that took place at school or on her way home.

* When discussing a request from the youth to go out with her friends to a movie or restaurant.

* When discussing whether she should go on a school trip that includes a sleepover away from home.

• When discussing what time she should come home in the evening.

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[30] See the books entitled *Fiqh us Sunnah* by *Sh. As-Sayyid Sabiq*, particularly the sections on *Ibadat* in general and Purification in particular. Also see *Raising Children in Islam*, volume one, chapter seven, by *Sh. Abdallah Naseh Elwan* and published by *Dar Al-Salam*.

[31] Please refer to chapters one to five of our book entitled *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope*

Q. 45

My daughter is 14 years old. Lately she has been oversensitive and often goes to her room and stays there for long hours by herself. I am concerned about her and the changes in her behaviour. Is there anything I can do to help the situation?

Answer Being oversensitive and staying alone for a long time is normal behaviour for a teenager. During adolescence, many youth become shy and a bit reserved because of all the physical changes they notice happening to their bodies. Parents can help their teens during this sensitive and crucial time by doing the following:

- Giving the teen more room for independence.
- Treating the teen in a way that shows that the parents are considerate of their feelings and look at them as adults.
- Talking to the youth in a way that shows that you, as a parent, care about her.
- Listening to what she has to say, to show that you value her opinion.
- Educating yourself about the youth environment and issues they face at school.[32] Casually open discussion with your teenager about these social issues and challenges in order to make her feel comfortable in talking to you about her feelings and about any difficulties she may be facing. Listen attentively to her and empathize with her situation.

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[32] See chapters one and two of our book entitled *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope.*

• Help her utilize her time and energy in a productive way by assigning her some adult-like responsibilities.

• Educate the youth regarding puberty, the physical and physiological aspects of it, and the responsibilities that come with being an adult.

• Facilitate and give her an opportunity to be in the company of good friends.

• Help your daughter become elevated spiritually. Take all the necessary steps to help her grow spiritually. For example, read the Qur'an with her, pray in *jama'a* together at home (and encourage her to be the *imam*, leading the prayer, once in a while), and take her to the mosque. Give her an opportunity to experience the beautiful feelings of making the early morning or evening *du'a*, at sunrise and sunset, in an outdoor setting, and help her get into the habit of doing it consistently. Organize a youth group where teenagers can learn together about the Prophet *SAAW*, his Companions, and their heroic actions when faced with worldly temptations.

Q. 46 - 49

Question 46

I am the mother of a 12-year-old boy. I feel that my son is at a point where he needs to be educated about sex. I have been asking my husband to do this and discuss the issue with my son. My husband feels that there is no need for this and that the children learn about it on their own. He says: "I don't feel comfortable taking to him about this. After all, nobody talked to me about sex when I was his age." Is there any way I can help my husband with this task?

Question 47

I have a 15-year-old daughter and a 13-year-old son. When my daughter was 11, I discussed different issues with her regarding gender relations and sex. As a single mother, I do not know what to do with my son regarding this issue. Could you please advise me?

Question 48

My son is in grade five, and I was shocked to find out that he knows everything about sex. I am worried about him knowing all of this at his young age. Do you have any advice?

Question 49

I am the father of a fifteen-year-old boy and a nine-year-old girl. I think it is a bad idea to discuss sex with my children since it would just open their eyes to something they are too young to know about anyway. My wife disagrees with me and thinks we should discuss this with them. What is your recommendation?

Answer

All of the questions listed above have many issues in common. These are:

1. Whether or not to talk to and educate teens and preteens about sex.

2. If a youth already knows about sex, either from friends or from sex education at school, whether it is still important for the parents to discuss it with him.

3. Whether a mother can talk to her son about sex education. This becomes an issue for single mothers or for mothers whose husbands refuse to educate their sons about sex.

4. How to discuss sex with your child.

Regarding the first issue, it is important to state that Islamically, all our actions should be based on knowledge, and should not be simply haphazard behaviours. Also, it is proven from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* that he talked to youth and advised them on this matter. For example, the Prophet *SAAW* said, "O Youth, whoever can afford to marry, then get married, and whoever cannot should fast because this will help him to abstain."[33] The Prophet *SAAW* also gave a lot of other advice regarding this matter.

Another important fact to consider is that children nowadays are already very exposed to this subject. Without looking for it or actively trying to find out about it, children hear about sex at school, on the radio and

[33] Al Bukhari, Muslim, and others

television, on the front page of magazines and newspapers while standing in the checkout aisle at the supermarket, and in countless other places. On top of this, the information available from all these sources is ethically and morally completely contradictory to the Islamic perspective. This is why it is crucial for parents to discuss sex with their children and not ignore it, naively expecting that the children will not be exposed to it at all.

Of course, as we just discussed, it is very likely that children already have a lot of information about this subject, but they do not know about it from the right perspective. Leaving them with only the information they get from outside sources is very harmful because, without additional guidance, they will take what they learned from outside as the standard. For example, they will see nothing wrong with having a boyfriend or girlfriend, and in fact will think it is the better thing to do. They will not see any problem with watching indecent movies, going to bars or dance clubs, joining sports teams where boys and girls play together and having physical contact, or talking on the phone with youth of the opposite gender.

Parents should talk and discuss the matter of sex with their children. This is how parents can guide and educate their children about the limits and Islamic etiquette and standards for cross-gender interaction.

Next comes the issue of whether a mother can educate her son about sex. Sex education includes several aspects, some of which a mother should discuss with her son, while others that are more specific are better handled by a father or another trusted man.

A mother should be able to discuss morals, ethics and limits regarding interaction with members of the opposite sex. For example, the mother can make it very clear that marriage is the only lawful way for men and women to be in a physical relationship. She can also let her son know that

his relationship with women or girls should be more formal and professional, as opposed to overly friendly. She could tell him that it is not suitable for boys and girls to go to movies together, out for lunch, to hang out, or to talk over the phone or Internet. This rule applies for all girls he interacts with, including classmates that he has known for a long time and grown up with.

With respect to certain specific aspects of sex education, such as physical development, personal hygiene, and *fiqh*, ideally, the father should be the one to have this conversation with the son. However, if this is not possible, the mother could look for a trusted man to talk to her son, such as an uncle, a close family friend, or a counselor from a youth group. If no one is available, she could actively research to find good books on the topic, including science books that discuss development and *fiqh* books that discuss hygiene and *fiqh* rules. She should give these books to her son, tell him they have good information for him to read about, and ask him to read them. She should also ask him to mark any passages that he does not understand or that he has questions about. She would then need to research these issues and come back to him with more material t' answer his questions.

Finally, how should parents discuss sex with their children? When talking to a teenager about puberty and the body changes they are experiencing, parents are advised to do it in a holistic manner that links it to Islamic values and morals as well as to the corresponding responsibilities and duties. We recommend that parents bring the Qur'an in when addressing this matter and use *Qur'anic* verses as a basis for the discussion. They could also use *ahadith* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*) to reinforce certain concepts. A science book with clear diagrams of internal body organs could also be helpful. Such books can be obtained from the public library, or parents can simply draw a diagram if they know how to do this. (Avoid showing diagrams of a naked person to show body parts. There is no real need for doing so and it does not reinforce the value of maintaining a high level of modesty).

If parents are already in the habit of reading Qur'an with their children and of explaining to them the general meaning of the verses they read, this practice will come in handy when it is time to discuss puberty. When a child is approaching puberty, the parent should have a private meeting with him in which they read together from the Qur'an a few relevant verses, such as chapter 40, verse 67:

> "It is He Who has created you from dust, then from a drop (of seed), then from a clot; Then he brings you forth as a child, then (ordains) that you reach the age of full strength and afterward that you become old — though some among you die before — and that you reach an appointed term, in order that you may understand."[34]

The parent should then explain the meaning of these verses and use them as an introduction to a conversation about the whole process of development and maturity. The parent should explain how Allah *SWT* created the first human being (Adam *AS*) from dust, and then how Allah *SWT* creates every baby in the mothers' womb and makes the baby develop from one stage to another until the baby reaches full term. After this, the baby is born by Allah's will and progresses through life from one stage to the next until she completes her term on earth and returns to her Creator. Thus, all our energy, all our power, and all our senses are from Allah *SWT*, and at the end of our lives we return to Him *SWT*.

On the Day of Judgment, Allah *SWT* will ask every one of us about how we used our lives and the powers given to us, and He will hold us accountable for what we did. This is why we should always focus on living our lives and doing things the way Allah *SWT* advised us to do them. When others around us are doing wrong and doing *haraam* things, we should not follow them. Instead, we should do the right thing, even if we are the only ones doing so. The Prophet *SAAW* said: "Let no one of you be a blind follower: whenever people do the right thing, he does it.

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[34] (Q40, V67)

And whenever people do the wrong thing, he does it. Train yourself so that, when people do the right thing, you also do it, and when people do the wrong thing, you abstain from it."[35]

Then the parent should mention that adolescence is one of the stages of development, which prepares humans to move from childhood to adulthood. The parent can explain that during adolescence all of the reproductive organs in the body grow at a fast rate under the effect of the hormones produced in the body by the will of Allah *SWT*, the Creator.

Here, we will discuss how to talk with a teenage boy, since how to talk with a teen girl is covered in a previous question.

Explain to the boy that once he reaches puberty, Allah *SWT* makes his body produce hormones called testosterone and androgens. These hormones make his body change. He may notice the growth of hair on his face, like a beard, and in other parts of his body, such as the pubic area and the underarms. His muscles and bones will get bigger and stronger. His voice will become deeper, like a man's voice. Other changes will also occur, and he will grow a little bit at a time in order to mature one day and become a full grown man who is ready to get married, be a father, take care of his family and look after his wife and children.

Once a boy becomes a man he must learn how to carry himself like one. *Alhamdulillah* that we have the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah to show us how to do this. The parent can then talk to the youth about how Allah *SWT* blessed him with a healthy and able body, which he must take care of because it is a trust from Allah *SWT*. The parent can also explain that Allah *SWT* has guided us to a lifestyle that will keep us healthy, happy and good by doing only ***halaal*** actions and staying away from ***haraam*** actions.

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[35] Tirmidhi

In another private session of reading Qur'an with your son, read together from *Surat Al-Araf*, verses 8 to 36. After explaining the general meaning, reflect on and emphasize all the Islamic concepts included in those verses. Continue to explain that during adolescence teenagers feel strong emotions and attraction toward members of the opposite sex, basically because their emotions are still in the process of maturing while their bodies mature at a much faster rate. "It is normal to feel that you have a crush on a girl, but what is important is that you control your feelings and do not act upon them. Though your feelings are very real and overwhelming to you, they will change and go away if you deal with them properly. Allah *SWT* has put a mechanism in your body to help release this energy and these feelings without you having to do anything *haraam*. This happens in the form of what is called a "wet dream" in which your body releases a certain secretion during your sleep. This is usually accompanied by a dream of a more or less romantic nature. This process helps the teenage boy return to a more neutral and calmer emotional state.

"Those who do not control their urges and who act upon their feelings, who start dating or talking to their friends about their crushes are certainly doing something *haraam*, which displeases Allah *SWT*." (The parent could elaborate more on the harm that the youth could cause to himself or to others. For example, getting a girl pregnant and having babies that do not have a father or mother who is ready to take care of them, hurting their family, interrupting their education, destroying their future, and above all, displeasing Allah *SWT* and losing His blessings).

The parent could talk about the *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* that indicates that among the seven categories of people who will be shaded by the mercy of Allah *SWT* on the Day of Judgment is a youth who grows up fulfilling his duties, and obeying and worshipping Allah *SWT*.[36] The parent can explain that Allah *SWT* has given the youth who does these things such a high status because He knows how difficult it is.

[36] Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Al-Nisai

The parent can continue to talk to his son on a more direct and personal level saying something like: "I always pray to Allah *SWT* that He make you one of these youth. I know you can be a right servant to Allah *SWT* and always do only *halaal* actions, and that I will see you in the highest level of *jannah insha'a* Allah. My dear son, stay away from any *haraam* actions even if you see almost everybody else doing them. You will see many boys who have girlfriends hanging out on the streets, going to '*R*' rated movies, and so on. Do not follow them in doing wrong and be among the believers whom Allah *SWT* described as those who are guarding their chastity and constant in their acts of obedience.[37] I assure you that you are not going to be missing out on anything.

"There is a right time and right conditions for everything. Allah told us very clearly that marriage is the only way for a man and woman to have physical relations. Through marriage, a man and woman can share their lives together, enjoy each other, take care of each other, and take care of the children that will come as a result of this marriage. This way, Allah *SWT* will bless you and always be on your side, and you will be in His shade on the Day of Judgment."

We would like to whisper into the ears of every parent that at this stage of life, your son desperately needs you. Be close to him and maintain a very good relationship with him. Be considerate of his feelings. Listen to and reason with him. Be assertive but loving at the same time. Guide him and help him to be close to Allah *SWT* because this is the only way he will be strong and able to rise above temptations.[38]

In question number 52 below, you will find further tips for addressing this issue with this age group, to ensure the success of this process.

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[37] (Q23, V1-5)

[38] Please refer to chapters one to five of our book entitled *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope.*

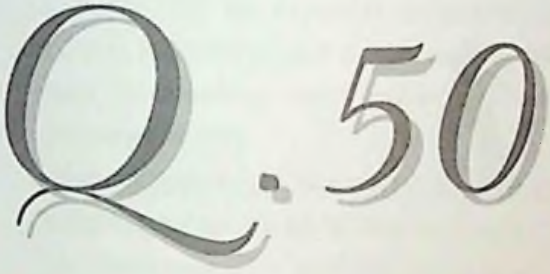
Note: The above discussions should be carried out over several sessions. Parents should use various opportunities and continue to follow up on this topic. Examples of such opportunities are:

- When the youth comes home from school and talks about incidents that took place at school or on his way home.

- When discussing a request from the youth to go out with his friends to a movie or restaurant.

- When discussing whether he should go on a school trip that includes a sleepover away from home.

- When discussing what time he should come home in the evening.



As you know, sex education is now taught in grade five of elementary school. Is this appropriate for our Muslim child?

Answer Sex education is a part of the curriculum in public schools; however, parents have the right to review the material presented and refuse that their children be taught any aspect of the curriculum that they do not agree with.

In addition, parents must find out in what kind of setting this sex education will take place: whether the class rooms will be co-ed or separate for boys and girls.

If the parents find out that the material being taught is acceptable and that girls and boys are taught separately, they should allow the children to participate in that class. If this is the case, parents also have a duty to follow up at home with discussion about the Islamic perspective on sexuality, connecting it to and emphasizing its moral dimension.

Q. 51

How can I approach the question of dating with my teenage children?

Answer

A good method for parents to use with such issues is not to wait until the question is asked or until the subject arises in a conversation. Instead, parents should be proactive. One way of being proactive is to use the opportunity of reciting Qur'an with your children. For example, parents can start a discussion after reading the Qur'an, such as the verses in chapter seven that talk about the creation of Prophet Adam *AS* and the eating from the tree. This is a good opportunity to talk about the relationship between the two genders. It is also a good opportunity to show how Satan whispers and tries to manipulate people into doing wrong.

Then parents can talk to their children in a manner that is suitable for their age, explaining the disadvantages of dating when marriage is not an option and clarifying that there is a right age and a right way to go about the process of marriage.

For any of these pieces of advice to work, it is absolutely crucial for parents to observe the following:

- Parents must have a good, warm, and open relationship with the youth.
- The family atmosphere should be more relaxed.

• Parents should help youth achieve a higher spiritual level and be close to Allah *SWT* by providing them with opportunities to learn and gain Islamic knowledge and to get used to Islamic practices. This could be done by attending youth groups and camps as well as through family learning sessions.

• Parents should help the youth maintain a group of friends who have the same values as you are trying to promote. This way, he has someone he can spend time with, and they can support each other against the negative peer pressure of popular culture.

Ensuring that the above conditions are fulfilled will encourage the youth to ask questions and discuss issues of concern with his parents without hesitation. It will also help children accept their parents' advice because of the strong bond that already exists between them.

Q. 52

I was really shocked and disappointed to discover that my 15-year-old son is going out with a girl at his school. We always tried to raise him to behave as a Muslim should, and he should know that this is wrong. When I asked him why he is doing this, he replied that he loves this girl and cannot live without her. He went on to ask me how this could be wrong when Allah is the One who created these feelings in him.

Answer

This is a very sad situation in which this 15-year-old boy has obviously mistaken a crush for real love.

You need to explain to him that just because humans are created with certain feelings it is not always in their best interest to act upon these feelings. For example, some people have bad tempers, but that does not mean that, when they get angry, they should lash out at people, scream, swear, hit, and do whatever they feel like doing.

As human beings, we are created with the ability to recognize and differentiate good from bad. We are also created with the free will to choose, and are capable of controlling our actions. As humans, we are also occasionally tempted to do wrong.

> "By the soul (Adam or a person or a soul) and Him Who perfected him in proportion; Then He showed him what is wrong for him and what is right for him _ The one who purifies himself is indeed successful, and the one who corrupts himself does indeed fail." [39]

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[39] (Q91, V7-10)

Temptations are a part of the test of life. Those who understand this, who control their actions and rise above their temptations, are those who will be successful in this life and in the Hereafter. Those who follow their temptations, however, will fail in both worlds. Allah *SWT* created us and He knows what is best for us. .

You should explain to your son that, at the age of 15, a youth is going through the changes caused by puberty, and it is natural for him to have a crush on someone (or on multiple people) and to feel completely consumed by these emotions. Feelings at this stage are very raw, exaggerated and temporary. Thus, it would be a big mistake to build a relationship on these temporary emotions. Those youth who follow their temptations end up harming themselves because these feelings change every few months, and they find themselves constantly "falling in love" with yet another person.

Continue the discussion with your son and explain the example from the *seerah* of the Prophet *SAAW*, which is similar to the case at hand. A young man came to the Prophet *SAAW* and said: "Allow me to fornicate." The Prophet *SAAW* invited the man to come and sit close to him, and he reasoned with him, saying: "Would you like that to happen to your mom? Would you like that to happen to your sister? Would you like that to happen to your aunt?" The young man's answer to each of these questions was: "Of course not, O Prophet of Allah." And the Prophet's reply each time was: "Likewise, other people would not like this to happen to their mothers, sisters, or aunts." After this conversation, the Prophet *SAAW* made *du'a* that Allah *SWT* guide him and make him chaste.[40]

Explaining this to your son is just the first step toward resolving this problem, and it is not enough on its own. Your son needs your support tremendously at this time. The emotions he is experiencing are strong and very real to him.

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[40] Ahmad

As parents, we can learn a lot from this hadith on how to deal with a young person who has a mistaken idea regarding dating. Some of the lessons we can learn are:

• Parents must reason with and explain to the youth the following:

- Why its wrong to merely follow and act upon our temptations
- The consequences of this wrong action on both himself and others
- How it is not fair to do to others what you would not like to be done to you or someone you love

• Parents must not reject the youth because of his actions. In a case like this, it is natural and instinctive to reject the person. However, unlike his Companions, the Prophet *SAAW* actually brought the person closer to him and sat down with him to talk. Many parents fall into the mistake of allowing their instinctive feelings of anger towards their son take over and dictate how they act with him. This will only cause the situation to worsen, because the more he is rejected by his parents, the more he will feel the need to be in this *haraam* relationship with his "girlfriend" so that he can feel accepted somewhere.

• The parents need to realize that their son is weak and vulnerable, and their focus should be on strengthening him. Some necessary steps to help him through this vulnerable time include:

– Building a strong parent-child bond, especially a father-son bond. This can be done by spending time together. You do not have to only sit and talk. You can play sports together, go grocery shopping or go for a hike or a bike trip (also find out whether your son would like to invite a friend or two along). Give your son more room for independence, and deal with him in a manner that shows you care about him.

– The parents (especially the father) should treat their son in a way that makes him feel valued. For example, take his opinion regarding some family decisions that have to be made and so on.

– Help the son become elevated spiritually. Note that the Prophet *SAAW* made du'a for the boy after reasoning with him. Parents should make sincere *du'a* for their son and teach him to make *du'a* for himself. They should take all the necessary steps to help their son grow spiritually. For example, they should read Qur'an with him, pray in *jama'a* together at home (and ask him to be the *imam*, leading the prayer, once in a while), and take him to the mosque. Also give him an opportunity to experience the beautiful feelings of making the early morning or evening *du'a*, at sunrise and sunset, in an outdoor setting, and help him to get into the habit of doing this consistently. Organize a youth group where they can learn together about the Prophet *SAAW* and his Companions and their heroic actions when facing worldly temptations.

– Search together for healthy and acceptable activities that will consume some of your son's time and energy and fill the emotional gap he is feeling. Sports, youth groups, work, and volunteering activities that contribute to society such as at hospitals, community centres, mosques and Islamic centers are all suggestions.

– The parents should educate the youth about the Islamic perspective on gender relations and clarify that marriage is the only *halaal* and lawful way for a physical relationship to exist between men and women. As the Prophet *SAAW* said: "O youth, whoever can afford to marry, then get married, and whoever cannot should fast because this will help him to abstain."[41]

Finally, we would like to whisper into the ears of every parent that your son desperately needs you to be close and considerate to him and to maintain a good relationship with him. Listen to him and reason with him. Be assertive but loving at the same time. Guide him and help him to be close to Allah *SWT* because this is the only way he will be strong and able to rise above temptations.

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[41] Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and others

Q. 53

How can parents educate their children about sex in an Islamic manner?

Answer Please refer to the previous questions in this section. In addition, we would like to take the opportunity of this question to emphasize a few important guidelines for parents to consider. These are:

• We should always remind ourselves that the Qur'an talks about matters regarding sex and it is done in the most dignified way. We should try our best to learn from the language and methodology of the Qur'an.

• Parents should not shy away from discussing this subject with their children. The beloved 'A'isha , the Mother of the Faithful *RAA*, complimented the women of the *ansar* for not shying away from asking questions about sex in order to have a good and sound understanding of the affairs of their *deen*.[42] It was said that modesty (*hayaa'*) should not prevent a Muslim from asking or answering questions that are relevant to helping the person have a better understanding of the *deen*.

• Sex is part of life, and we must deal with the issues surrounding it. We should not view it as something dirty as long as it is practiced within the limits and etiquette of Islamic marriage.

• We should always encourage our children to approach us, their parents, with any of their questions or concerns, no matter how young or old the child may be or how difficult and confusing the question is. It is our duty

[42] Tahtheeb Sunnan Abu Dawoud

to listen to and properly deal with our children's questions and concerns. When we do not know the answers, it is also our duty to find out.

• We also advise parents to adopt a policy of having an open relationship with their children and of not being critical or judgmental when they ask questions or want to discuss any issue. Parents should try their best to be approachable and friendly.[43] Having a judgmental and critical attitude may turn children away from directing questions to their parents. Because of such an attitude, children may prefer to ask one of their peers or school counselors, who may give them advice that the parents would not like because it goes against their values.

• Sex education is a continuous process, and it is our duty to use various opportunities to provide our children with the proper knowledge about sex that is suitable for their age.

• Our answers to our children's questions about sex should convey only true facts and information, should be appropriate to their age, and should be given using the proper language.

• Make sure that the information you provide is correct and clear. Consult references on the subject if you do not have the proper information yourself.

• Educate yourself about the nature of teenagers and the environment they live in as well as the changes they go through during these years. Gain knowledge about their physical, psychological, spiritual and emotional changes.[44] This will help you to be considerate and understanding of the struggle they are experiencing.

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[43] Refer to chapters one and three of our book entitled *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope*, published by Amana Publications, for tips on how to improve your relationship with your child and be approachable parents.

[44] Same reference as above.

Celebrations

Q.54

How can we prepare our children for Ramadan even though they are surrounded by a non-Islamic environment at school?

Answer To prepare children for Ramadan, start one month ahead, or whatever time is left before *Ramadan*, by talking to the children about how excited you are for *Ramadan* to be coming soon *insha'a* Allah. According to the children's age, explain to them why *Ramadan* is so beautiful and good for us, that *Ramadan* is the time for our sins to be forgiven and for rewards to be earned, and that it is an opportunity to do good deeds more easily.

If the children are young, read some Islamic books to them about *Ramadan*. There are many such books available.

If the children are older, read with them the various *ahadith* and verses from the Qur'an that talk about the benefits and special privileges given to us during *Ramadan*.

Make some plans with your children of things they would like to do during *Ramadan*, such as visiting or hosting some of their friends' families, going to a community *iftar*, or going to the mosque on the week-ends to pray *taraweeh*.

Talk with them about any special food or desserts they would like you to prepare during *Ramadan*, or some special family time that you could have during *Ramadan*. If the children are young, play games with them that celebrate *Ramadan*, and sing songs with them about *Ramadan*. Prepare some artwork at home with them about *Ramadan*, decorate the house and the rooms with their artwork and make it very obvious all through the house that it is a special time.

Even young children can participate in fasting. Parents can ask them if they would like to fast after breakfast for a couple of hours, or until lunch or dinner time, depending on the child's age. Then, parents can make a big deal of it, being very encouraging of the children and telling everybody in the family that they fasted for a certain period of time. Parents can tell them that they are good Muslims, that Allah *SWT* has given them a lot of reward, and that it has been written for them in their book of good deeds.

When parents practice the Sunnah of the Prophet *SAAW* by fasting voluntarily on Mondays and Thursdays or at other recommended times during the year, this gives them an opportunity to talk about fasting in general, because the children will ask them why they are fasting on these days. It also gives parents an opportunity to remind them of *Ramadan*.

Q. 55

We live in North America. This culture is completely different from Islamic culture. For example, people here celebrate several holidays, such as Halloween at the end of October, Thanksgiving towards the end of November, Christmas towards the end of December, New Year's Day and Valentine's Day. Should we allow our children to participate in these celebrations? If the answer is no, what should we do to prevent our children from feeling inferior to their peers because they do not participate in these celebrations?

Answer

This is a very important question that is being asked in almost every workshop we conduct and every lecture we deliver during national conventions and regional conferences in North America. We also receive similar questions via e-mail from Muslims in various parts of the world.

To answer this question we should emphasize the following points:

• As Muslims we must be careful not to group all celebrations into one category. Parents should look at each celebration separately and objectively, and then make an informed decision. For example, Thanksgiving is completely different from Christmas or Halloween.

• Parents should ask themselves the following questions about the celebration under consideration:

– What is the origin of the celebration?
– Does it have a religious dimension or connotation?
– What kind of message will this celebration send to my child?

– What kind of impression is this celebration going to have on my child?
– Is it a once-in-a-lifetime event or a regular celebration that will be a part of my child's life and personality in the future?

If we ask ourselves these questions about the above-mentioned celebrations, we can easily say that we should not celebrate or allow our children to celebrate Halloween, Christmas, or Valentine's Day.

Thanksgiving, however, may be different. We should give thanks to Allah *SWT* and teach our children to be grateful to Him for all His bounties all the time, not just one day a year. However, if somebody observes Thanksgiving, this is not a sin or a crime.

Having said this, what should parents do at the time of these celebrations, particularly if their children attend public school where these holidays are regularly observed and encouraged by the school system? Here is some advice for every Muslim parent to help them deal with this dilemma:

• Meet your child's teacher early in the school year to tell him or her that your child is a Muslim and will not be celebrating Christmas. However, you do not want your child to miss out on the academic lessons. Since most public school systems use thematic methods for teaching, talking about Christmas in the classroom can start as early as mid-November. Ask the teacher to allow your child to do other activities that are not related to the holiday. For example, your child could draw a star or a crescent instead of a Christmas tree, or write a letter to his grandpa instead of to Santa. This way the child will still be part of the lesson, but with a reduction of the religious aspect of the holiday and its effect on your child.

• On the day of the big Christmas party, do not send your child to school. Make that day special and fun for your child at home. You could invite some of her Muslim friends, who are also not going to school that day, and have a small gathering for them. In addition to the fun time, you can take the opportunity to teach them about Prophet Issa *SAAW*, his miraculous birth, the miracles he performed by Allah's permission, and so on.

• Be careful not to ridicule the holidays and celebrations of others. Some parents may become frustrated and overwhelmed with their children's attraction to the beautiful Christmas decorations, and might make comments such as "Christmas lights are ugly!" This is not right, nor is it true. In addition, it could give your child the wrong impression. In such a situation, parents must always acknowledge that the decoration is nice, that the lights look good, and always tell the truth.

• It is very important to make *Ramadan* and the two *Eid* celebrations very special and filled with fun and good memories for your children, to compensate for them not being a part of the other celebrations.

• Some of the early scholars issued *fatwas* indicating that Muslims should not congratulate non-Muslims on their religious celebrations. These *fatwas* may have been applicable during their time and in their environment, but they are not applicable nowadays or in the North American environment. As a matter of fact, other *fatwas* indicate that there is nothing wrong with extending congratulatory wishes to non Muslims during their religious celebrations.[45]

Please refer to chapter nine of our book entitled *Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope* for more tips on how to deal with Christmas and Halloween celebrations. Another good source is the SoundVision Website, where you can find samples of letters to send to your child's school administration to help you say no to such celebrations.[46]

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[45] Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradawy. Contemporary Fatwas Volume 3, Dar Al Qalam for Distribution and Publications, Kuwait, 2001.

[46] SoundVision.com newsletters

Q. 56

Sometimes I find myself in a situation where I do not know how to answer my daughter's questions. She is four years old. She always compares herself to other Muslim children from families we know in the community. How should I answer when she asks me, "How come I can't go trick-or-treating when Mona can?" or "Why can't I go to school for the Christmas party when Zaynab can?"

Answer

Please refer to the previous question, which is related to allowing or not allowing our children to participate in certain activities, such as trick-or-treating, and celebrations, such as Christmas.

As for what you should say to your daughter when she compares herself with other Muslim girls in the community who may be participating in some of these celebrations, we suggest the following:

• Always welcome your child's question and keep a smiling face. Never show disappointment when your child asks you a question, even if you do not know how to answer it. As a matter of fact, parents should always encourage their children to ask questions. It gives the parents an opportunity to discuss and teach their child proper behaviour and moral values. Every question that a child asks may represent a challenge to the parent, but it is also the perfect occasion for parents to interact with the child and give her the proper answer according to her age.

• Empathize with your daughter. Try to put yourself in her position. Tell her that you know how she feels. This will comfort her a lot.

• At the same time, explain to her in a very simple way that we are all going to meet Allah *SWT* on the Day of Judgment as individuals, and we will be judged as individuals. It is not a valid excuse for any one of us to say "But so-and-so was doing the same thing." You may also read for her the verse in *Surat Maryam*, which says: "And every one of them will appear before Allah on Resurrection day in a lonely state."[47] You can also recite the verse of *Surat Al-Ana'am* that says: "And now indeed you have come to Us in a lonely state, even as We created you in the first instance."[48]

• It may also be a good idea to tell your daughter that people are different. All Muslims try their best to obey Allah *SWT*. Some may be able to obey most of Allah's orders, and others may be able to obey only some of them.We should always try to apply all of Allah's orders, and when we see somebody who is not applying them, we should try to remind her and help her in a nice and kind way, rather than imitate her and do what she is doing.

[47] (Q19, V95)
[48] (Q6, V94)

Q. 57

My daughter is 16 years old. She has been attending public school. She is graduating from high school this year insha'a Allah. It is early, but I am expecting her to ask me about going to the prom. I feel that it is not proper for a Muslim girl to attend such a party and I have been hinting to this, but we never discuss it in detail with her (neither myself, nor her father). I am very concerned about this and do not know how to discuss it with her. Can you please advise me on the best way to go about this? Jazakum Allah Khayran.

Answer

This is a very important question that usually occupies the minds of many parents. Prom is an unacceptable activity for Muslims. It includes dancing and drinking. It is also held in an environment of free mixing between boys and girls. All these factors make it an unacceptable activity for a Muslim to attend.

The question now is how to make sure that our teenagers understand this and that they are willing to endure not being a part of the group during this final gathering with their peers to bring closure to an important stage of their life.

As a parent, you can do this by talking to your daughter in a kind manner, recognizing and legitimizing her wish to go and see her friends, say goodbye, attend this celebration, and be a part of everybody's last memory. Tell her that you really understand her feelings and know that it would mean a lot to her to attend. Show her that you recognize how sad it is for her not to be able to participate. Tell her, however, that it is too

bad that prom includes dancing, drinking and free mixing between members of the opposite sex, because that makes it impossible for her to participate in it.

Although she cannot participate in prom, she still needs to say goodbye to her friends in a *halaal* way that will also be a good memory for her. Together with your daughter, you should brainstorm ways of doing this, taking into consideration that it should be girls only and should not include Islamically objectionable things. Some examples could be:

- Having a party at your home hosted by your daughter for her girlfriends
- Going together to a restaurant for lunch and spending the afternoon in a park
- Going together to a bowling alley for few games and then having dinner together in your home

We hope this will help you with your daughter. Be kind and gentle when you talk to her. We make *du'a* to Allah *SWT* for your success.

Q. 58

My husband and I are always arguing about celebrating our child's birthday. He says there is nothing wrong with it, while I think birthdays should not be celebrated. After all, wouldn't celebrating birthdays be a blind imitation of a Western tradition? Can you please tell us whether or not it is proper to celebrate birthdays? Jazakum Allah Khayran.

Answer

To answer this question properly we have to keep in mind four basic Islamic principles. These are:

1. **The basic *asl*[49] refers to the permissibility of things.** This principle, established by Islam, denotes that things that Allah *SWT* has created and the benefits derived from them are essentially for man's use, and are therefore permissible. Nothing is *haraam* except what is prohibited by a ound and explicit text from the Lawgiver, Allah *SWT*. If the text is not sound, as in the case of a weak *hadith*, or if it is not explicit in stating the prohibition, the original principle of permissibility applies.

2. "When the Prophet *SAAW* came to Madinah, he found that they had two days of celebration and feasts. He told them that **Allah *SWT* has replaced these two days with two better days**: the two ***Eids*, *Eid* ul *Adha* and *Eid ul Fitr*."[50] It is clear from this hadith that the Prophet *SAAW* limited annual celebrations to only the two *Eids*.

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[49] *Asl*, plural usul, denotes origin, source, foundation, basis, fundamental or principle.
[50] Muslim

3. **"Every soul is responsible for what it earns."**[51] The concept of accountability is deeply entrenched in the Islamic system, in all areas and at all levels. Muslims are always encouraged to look deeply into the expected consequences of any action before doing it. If the consequences are expected to cause definite harm, Muslims should try to avoid the action. If the consequences are expected to bring benefits, it is good to do such an action.

4. **Choose the lesser of two evils.** This is a great rule in Islamic jurisprudence that was deduced by the scholars from the practices of the Prophet *SAAW* and the teachings of Qur'an. This rule should be understood properly and applied wisely by parents in the North American environment.

Based on the first principle, some say that there is nothing wrong with celebrating birthdays, since there is no specific text prohibiting it. However, looking at the second principle, we see that the Prophet *SAAW* clearly instructed us that nothing should be celebrated annually or observed regularly except the two *Eids*: *Al Fitr* and *Al Adha*. Also, the fact that the practice of celebrating birthdays was not known among the early Muslims may raise the question "Why should we start promoting a Western tradition that may not be proper?"

Bearing in mind the above arguments so far, the least that could be said about celebrating birthdays is that it is a questionable or controversial practice. However, this is not the end of the story. There are other factors that should be considered in the North American environment, such as the consequences of celebrating versus ignoring birthdays.

Among the unacceptable consequences of celebrating birthdays in the current Western format is that the birthday person is the centre of attention and the only person who feels special during the celebration. This may promote traces of arrogance in the personality of some children and make them full of themselves. Also, the celebration format may be unacceptable to some because of the lavish gifts that some parents buy for their children and the time wasted just eating and playing games.

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[51](Q74, V38)

On the other hand, ignoring the birthday of a school-age child may lead the child to think that his parents do not care about him and that his teacher loves him much more than his parents. This is because teachers in public schools usually wish the children a happy birthday and may even have a little celebration in the class. We do not think that any parent would like to leave his or her child with such an impression.

Clearly, the answer to this question is not a simple yes or no. All of the above factors must be taken into consideration, and the answer could vary from one situation to another, depending on the child's age and specific conditions.

The reality is that most Muslim parents now in North America celebrate their children's birthdays. Our objective should be for our Muslim children to give up these celebrations in their current format. However, this objective, though noble, cannot be achieved in only one step. With the parents' wisdom in dealing with the situation *insha'a* Allah this objective can be achieved gradually. Here is what we suggest to achieve this goal *insha'a* Allah in the most amicable way while avoiding the negative consequences discussed earlier:

• When the child is very young (one to four years old) and is not yet attending school, there is no need for the parents to initiate a birthday celebration for her. No harmful effects can be expected from this practice, because the child is not likely to notice that other children are celebrating their birthdays.

• If the child is school age, it would be a big mistake to completely ignore the issue of birthdays. In such a situation, the answer could be to celebrate the child's birthday but in a manner that is low-key. For example, the child could invite two or three of his friends, have a cake and some food that he likes, and play a few games with his friends. He could sit with his parents, either before his friends arrive or after they leave, and discuss what he wants to do throughout the coming year to learn more and be a better person. Thus, you shift the focus of the celebration away from the

food and games toward a more Islamic format of self-evaluation for improvement. This way, as the child is being entertained, he is also learning an important Islamic concept: the concept of self-assessment and auditing our deeds (*muhassabah*). Parents could use the opportunity to congratulate him for his achievements in the past year. They could also remind him that birthdays are not really big celebrations in Islam, but that they are celebrating his birthday now so he does not feel left out or feel bad. Parents could mention the *hadith* of the Prophet *SAAW* that Allah *SWT* has replaced all celebrations with two meaningful celebrations: *Eid ul Fitr* and *Eid ul Adha*. This way you have chosen the lesser harm (of having a limited and small-scale celebration in an acceptable format) to avoid a greater harm (the child's feeling that his parents do not love him and that his school teacher loves him more). Tell the child that, once he is ready to let go of celebrating his birthday, he should tell you. By then you would be fully applying the *hadith* of the Prophet *SAAW*.

In addition to the above gradual approach to help your child give up celebrating birthdays, always make the celebrations of the two *Eids* much bigger and more entertaining for him in every aspect: in the home environment, and with gifts and new clothes so that he can enjoy it more than any birthday.

Another suggestion is that you explain to the children that, during *Eid*, all Muslims are happy and feel special, while at a birthday party only one person feels special.

Miscellaneous

Q. 59

What could cause a child to be hyperactive? I think that my five-year-old boy is very hyperactive because he jumps a lot on the bed and keeps running around the apartment, which makes noise and disturbs the neighbors. What can I do, observe, or look for to avoid or minimize his hyperactive behaviour?

Answer

Children are full of energy, which they must channel in the proper direction. They need to run around, play ball and jump regularly to get rid of this energy. Current lifestyles do not usually give children an opportunity to do this, especially if they are living in an apartment building. Parents should make sure that their children are given the opportunity to go out to the park often enough to get rid of any excess energy they may have. If parents cannot take the child regularly to the playground or park, they should modify their living quarters to suit the child's need for activity. For example, if you live in a three-bedroom apartment, designate one room for the children to use as a playroom. In this room, parents should spread a couple of mattresses on the floor to allow the children to jump without disturbing the neighbors. Even with a playroom, parents should still give children the opportunity to occasionally go out.

Here are some things that you should be monitoring to prevent your children from becoming hyperactive:

• Watch what kind of food they eat and what kind of diet they are following. Are they eating many foods that contain high levels of sugar, preservatives, food colours, and so on? The fluids they drink also have to

be observed. How many cans of pop or juice drinks do they have a day? Any foods or drinks that contain high levels of sugar should be consumed in moderation.

• Look at how they spend their time. Do we get them involved in enough structured activities to help them channel their energy in the proper direction and help them in a healthy and positive way? How many times do we take them out for camping, hiking, and sports, for example?

• Check your reaction to the things they do. They may have learned from previous behaviour that the way to get your attention is by being hyperactive. In the past, you may have reacted in a way that perpetuated this pattern of behaviour. If this is so, you have to start changing how you react to their level of activity to make sure it is at a moderate and acceptable level.

How can we encourage our children to build the good habit of reading books? What is our responsibility towards the material they read, and how can we help them pick the right books that are not harmful to them?

Getting into the habit of reading is very important. The first word revealed in Qur'an was *iqra*, which means *read* or *recite*. Reading is the most important tool for acquiring knowledge. As Muslims, we are encouraged to continuously seek knowledge throughout the various stages of our lives.

To help our children acquire good reading habits, we should start very early with them. When they are young and unable to read by themselves, we should read to them. We should select nice and interesting stories that suit their age. We should also make reading to them a fun and loving experience. Always provide a warm and cozy atmosphere when you are reading to them. Be animated and excited by acting out the various characters in the story to keep them interested and make them love the experience of reading.

Let them read to you when they grow a little older and are able to read with difficulty. Again, the time you spend together should be fun. Make sure that the books you select are suitable for their age in terms of the size of the letters and the story line. Islamic literature is full of wonderful books with stories about the prophets as well as great Islamic personalities in the history of Islam.

In addition to Islamic books, parents could use many books available at their local public library. However, parents should check to make sure that these books are conveying the proper message for your child's age.

There is no doubt that we, as parents, are responsible for the material we expose our children to. The Qur'an tells us that we are responsible for what we hear, what we see, and even what goes through our hearts and minds.[52] As such, we should be very careful about which books we read to our children when they are young, and which books we allow them to read when they are older.

[52](Q17, V37)

Q. 61

Is there any relationship between food and children's behavior? If so, could you explain it?

Answer Yes, there is a relationship between the food a child eats and her behavior. The number of children who are allergic to many artificial foods, such as food colouring, preservatives, and refined foods including sugar and white flour is on the rise. Some of these children become hyperactive and have difficulty concentrating. Therefore, we advise parents to feed their children healthy and wholesome food. Get them used to drinking water, which can give them a healthy urinary system. Limit their intake of soft drinks and sweetened juices because the sugar gives them a feeling of fullness and energy, making them think that they do not need to eat. In addition, the carbonation in soft drinks prevents calcium from building up in their bones, leading to weaker bones. On top of all this, the sugar level in their blood oscillates after drinking these sweetened drinks, which causes them to be restless, hyperactive and unable to concentrate. Children should eat fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grain wheat and rice, honey and molasses (which are better than jam or chocolate), and peanut butter.

Q. 62

I have a 19-year-old daughter, who is a university student. Just a few days ago she told me that there is a boy in her class who wants to marry her. She says that she trusts him enough and thinks that she would be able to live happily with him. She said that she is ready to accept whatever my decision is. She has been saying no to this boy for a long time because she thought that I would feel very bad if she said yes to him. She says she will never do anything that I am not ready to approve. What should I do?

Answer

Firstly, we would like to commend you for having such a strong bond with your daughter, to the extent she wants your approval for her marriage.

ly, we assume that the boy she would like to marry is a Muslim. ase, talk with your daughter about what she is looking for in the would like to marry, perhaps even going as far as writing down . qualities. Discuss what she wants her family life to be like after .age. Through this discussion, you can guide your daughter to have . clear idea about the attributes of a good husband and how they are going to affect her quality of life. Examples of attributes to look for in a husband are: whether he observes his prayers, whether he is polite and good tempered, and whether he lives and judges things in accordance with the rulings of Islam.

If the boy does have a good character, then you should look deeper into the issue because he may be a good match for your daughter. However, you must pay some attention to his ability to support himself and his wife.

We do not mean that you should be materialistic, but rather that you should think realistically about marriage responsibilities.

Consider the boy's age in terms of his suitability for being responsible for your daughter. If he is as young as your daughter, make sure that you are sure about his level of maturity and responsibility for marriage.

One more important piece of advice is that you should fully involve the boy's family in the marriage process and make sure that his family is fully aware of it. For further details on how to go about the process of a proper marriage, please consult chapter three of our new book entitled *Blissful Marriage: A Practical Islamic Guide*, published by Amana Publications.

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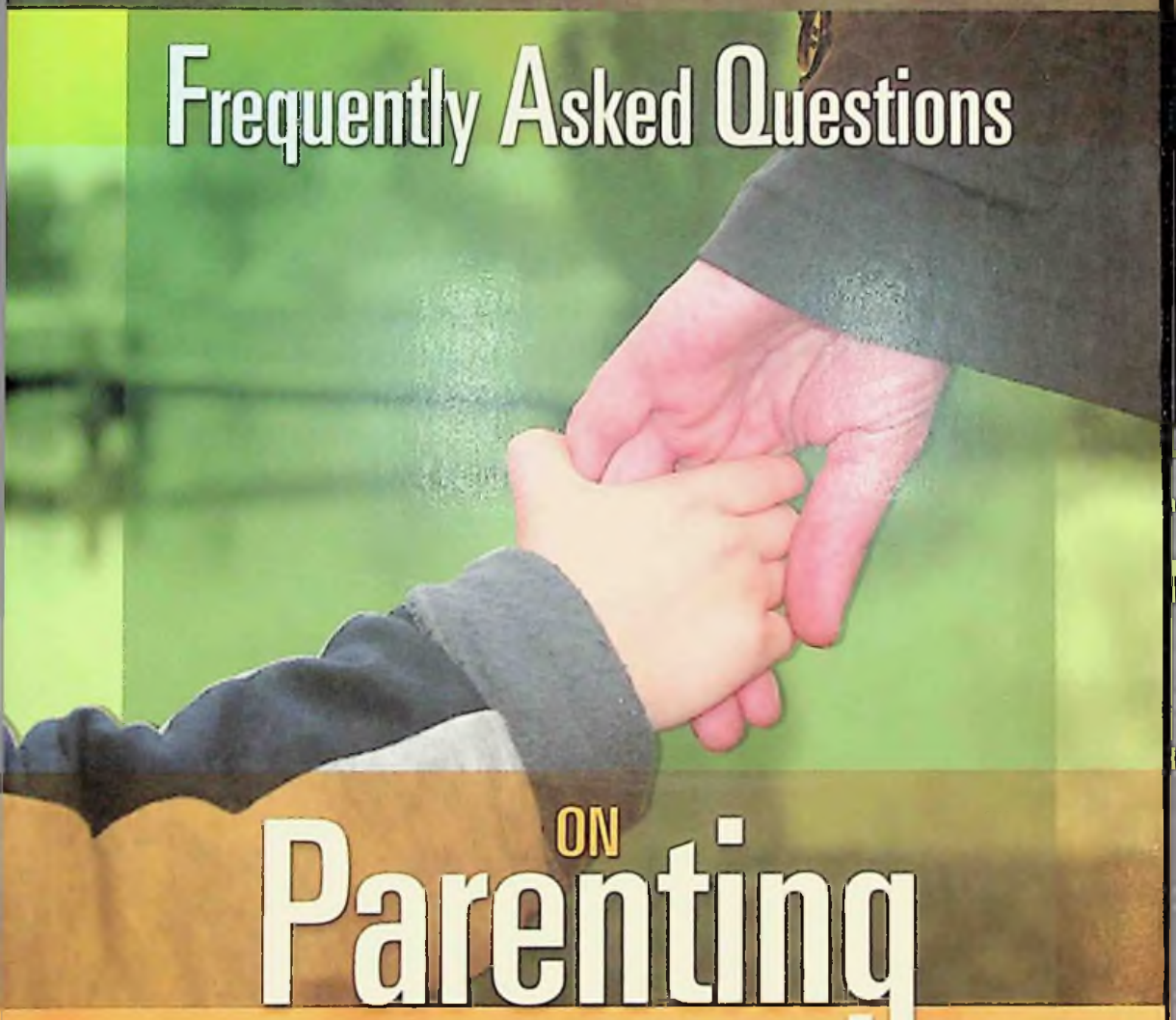
ANSWERS TO

Frequently Asked Questions



ON Parenting

(PART 2)

Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Rida Beshir

amana publications

Answers

to

Frequently Asked Questions

on

Parenting

[PART 2]

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We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our daughter, Sumaiya, for all the time and hard work she put into editing this book. We will be forever indebted to her for her gracious support and dedication to this work. May Allah bless her, keep her on the Straight Path and reward her with *jannah*.

We kindly request that every reader make *du'a* for her.

Introduction

As we indicated in the introduction of part one of this series, during workshops and convention sessions, we usually allocate time to answer questions from the audience. We try our best during this time to respond to the questions in the most comprehensive way. However, with a hot topic like parenting, particularly in North America, there is never enough time to give detailed answers and at the same time respond to as many audience member's questions as possible. Over the years, we have noticed that certain questions come up repeatedly during our parenting workshops and lectures in various conferences/conventions on the subject of raising children in the North American society. Because of this, we feel that these questions represent crucial issues of concern occupying the minds of the great majority of parents, and as such, they deserve to be addressed in enough detail to help clarify these issues and provide Muslim parents with the proper advice supported by Qur'an as well as the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.

This is why we decided to write this series of books to answer "Frequently Asked Questions about Raising Children in North America."

This is part two of the series. We apologize for the delay and for not making it available to the reader right after part one as we promised when we started the series. Due to both our health conditions as well as a very heavy traveling schedule presenting our parenting workshops, we were unable to find the proper time to put into part two of the series for some time. We thank Allah *SWT* that He blessed our time and effort, and finally with His grace, that we are able to present the reader with this work.

Part two covers a variety of topics ranging from character building and personality development to the environment. It also addresses

questions relating to young children, pre-teens, and teens. It is important to note that all the questions in this series are real and were asked on one occasion or another by attendees of a workshop, an audience member at a conference/convention, or during our live dialogue on various websites such as www.masnet.org and www.islamonline.net.

We would also like to emphasize that our methodology in answering these questions will, as is always the case with our books, be from an Islamic perspective, drawing heavily on verses of Qur'an, teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events of his Seerah. We will also, insha'a Allah, draw on the practical experience we have walhamdulilah gained from countless parenting and counseling sessions during the last few years and our knowledge of child psychology.

We realize that this is a huge responsibility and we sincerely pray to Allah *SWT* to help us provide the right answers to these questions as well as to make this series benefit as many Muslim families as possible in their quest to be the best Muslim parents for their children. We also ask Him to protect our Muslim families, our Muslim youth, our Muslim children and the whole Muslim Ummah.

A note on all Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*:

Please note that throughout the book, all the Quranic verses and sayings Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* mentioned are the English translations of the ning of the original text in Arabic. Though we have striven to use the t accurate English translations available, we remind the reader that any all translations are: firstly, not the original words of Allah *SWT* or His ophet *SAAW*, and secondly, can never be as accurate as the original Arabic text.

Drs. Ekram & M. Rida Beshir

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Building Characters and Developing Personality

I have three children: a 7 year old boy, a 5 year old girl and a 4 year old boy. I believe in raising them as strong confident Muslims who are comfortable with themselves as Muslims and are even proud to belong to the Muslim Ummah. I feel this is very important for their identity and I would like it if you could provide me with a few tips on what I should do to fulfill this vision I have for my children.

Answer This is a very important question and the concern of this sister is genuine and every Muslim parent should have the same concern. Muslims living in North America, Europe, or other places as minorities, should always have a vision for their children to raise them as strong confident personalities who are proud of their identity as Muslims. To fulfill this vision, parents have to work very hard with their children and do following:

- Strengthen their faith and belief in Allah as their creator and Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* as their role model
- Make them feel loved and accepted
- Train them to be capable and highly skilled
- Help them to be critical thinkers

Here are some tips parents can use to achieve the above goals:

To strengthen the Islamic beliefs of our children, we have to help them know Allah *SWT* and love Him, as well as to know the Prophet *SAAW* and take him as a role model. To do this, we have to link them to their creator *SWT*. See the answer to question 4 in this section for tips on how to link our children to Allah *SWT* and keep them connected with Him

at various stages of their lives. Parents also have to live Islam at home, providing a wonderful and warm family atmosphere, be fair in dealing with the children, and participate together in various positive and healthy activities. Another important element in helping strengthen our children's belief in Islam is to help them acquire Islamic habits and concepts[1] and teach/train them to say various Prophetic du'as at different times of the day and on various occasions.

For our children to be confident and feel proud as Muslims, it is very important that they feel loved and accepted for who they are, and not because they are top academic achievers or because they have strong athletic abilities. They have to feel valued by their parents, and every achievement they do should be acknowledged and applauded. Parents should make their children feel special as individuals by trying to find their children's area of strength, recognizing it, and helping their children develop it and excel in it. In their dealings with their children, parents should also avoid being perfectionist, over protective, or humiliating. This will help strengthen children's self esteem.[2]

We should also strive very hard to make sure that our children are capable and highly skilled. This will help them feel confident and proud of their identity as Muslims because they will not feel that they are less than their peers. Rather, they will feel that they are equal to their peers and can compete in every area with them. Prophet Mohammad *SAAW* advised us to teach our children every useful skill for their age and their environment. Omar Ibn Al-Khattab *RAA* said: "Teach you children swimming, shooting, and horse back riding." These types of skills were the survival skills needed for their environment. As parents we can't limit the meaning of these teachings to these three skills only. We should teach

[1] See chapter 6 in our book *Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope* amana Publications, second edition 2004

[2] See chapter 1 of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective*. Amana Publications, third edition, 2004

our children every possible skill that is needed for their survival in the Western society. Sports skills relevant to Western society, such as riding a bike at a young age, knowing how to throw a baseball, catch it with a glove, and hit it with a bat etc. are very important for our children's self esteem. The time spent training them in these types of skills is not wasted time. It is a great investment in their well-being and self image. We should also teach our children other skills needed for their survival in this society such as administrative skills, computer skills, communication skills, business skills, and even self defense in some areas of North America.

To help our children be critical thinkers, we should work with them in the following areas:

- Train them in decision making from an early age. For example, for a three year old child, rather than picking an outfit out for him/her and dressing him/her, it is better to put two outfits on the bed and ask him/her to choose one for the outing. For a 5 or 6 year old, rather than deciding on your own what you want him/her to do during the weekend, it is better to ask him/her how they want to spend their weekend. Find out if he/she wants to visit a friend or if he/she wants to go to the park.
- Consult with children from an early age about decisions related to family matters, such as the food they want to eat at supper, the move you are planning to a new house/apartment, etc.
- Guide and explain the consequences of different choices to help them understand the pros and cons of the decisions they make and feel comfortable with it.
- Allow children to occasionally make their own choices in non-critical matters such as the type of snack they will take with them to school, etc.

Is it OK to spoil our children and pamper them?

Answer The answer to this question will depend on how the questioner defines spoil and pamper. If spoil and pamper means allowing children to do anything they like, without teaching them that there are consequences for their actions and that they have to pay attention to these consequences and think about them before doing these actions, then of course, in this case, it is not OK to spoil or pamper our children.

If spoil and pamper means that when our children make a mistake, we don't point out to them that their action is not accepted, or indicate to them that they have made a mistake, or teach them how to do it properly next time, or help them during the process of training them in the correct and acceptable behaviour, then of course it is not OK to pamper or spoil our children.

If spoil and pamper means that whenever they ask us to buy something for them (a toy, clothing), we rush and buy it for them no matter how many other toys they have, or when we last bought clothes for them, and whether or not they need it, then of course, in this case, it is not OK to spoil or pamper them.

If spoil and pamper means that when they ask us to go on a school trip or to attend the prom or other school parties where opposite sexes are

mixing and mingling freely, of course it is not OK to spoil and pamper them. Or if it means that we allow them to participate in such activities/parties, where sexually stimulating music is being played loudly and almost everyone is drunk and dancing like crazy, of course, it is not OK. As a matter of fact we should never grant them their wishes to attend these kinds of activities because of the unhealthy and dire consequences on their morals and ethical behaviour. Parents should discuss with and explain to their children the logic behind not allowing them to participate in these kinds of gatherings, and should never give in to their children's pleas or any other societal pressure.

In all of the above cases and any other similar situations, it is not OK to spoil and pamper our children. However, if spoiling our children and pampering them means making them feel special and close to us, this is not only allowed, but it is also recommended and encouraged. If spoiling and pampering them means developing a strong bond between us and our children, if it means expressing our love to them very often, then, again, it is not only OK, but it is encouraged and recommended to do so. In fact, it is particularly important in this society, where Muslims are a minority, to build a strong bond and open channels of communication between parents and children. It is just as crucial for Muslims living as a minority in any place in the world. This is because we want our children to be able to take after us and accept our advice and the values and concepts we try to instill in them, particularly in the adolescent stage where teens are strongly drawn to pleasing their peers and are continuously seeking their peers' approval.

Making our children feel special and having this special relationship with them will be of great help in the above area. That is why it is important to spoil and pamper our children in the correct sense.

(a) I attended one of your "Positive Parenting Skills" workshops where you emphasized repeatedly the importance of using the young age of the child to instill Islamic concepts and build healthy habits before they move to stage two. I have two children 14 and 16 years old, and I didn't do this with them when they were young. Does this mean that I missed the boat and I wouldn't be able to help them having a good Islamic personality? Is their anything that I should be doing now to rectify the situation?

(3-b) I attended one of your positive parenting skills workshops. I remember you talking about the two stages that children generally go through as far as approval concerns. My question is: Suppose I didn't start early with my child, and he is now in the second stage, can I do anything to make sure that he will become a good person Islamically?

(3-c) Can you please advise us on the following: For parents who didn't do a good job with their children, who had no chance to see your books and follow your beautiful recommendations, their children are now fashionable, they know little religion and they don't even apply it. They dress Western and act Western. Is it too late for them to try to do something with their children? I still have some hope, but I don't know where and how to start?

These three questions address the same issue, as such, we will answer them together insha'a Allah. They are very important questions and deserve to be addressed in detail. As such, and for the benefit of all readers, it is necessary to explain and

provide a brief summary of stage two, as mentioned in the above questions. When it comes to seeking approval, in general, children go through two stages. In the first stage, which extends from birth to almost 9-10 years old, the approval of parents is the most important thing for children. The younger the child is, the stronger his need for approval from his parents. As the child gets older, a shift starts taking place toward seeking approval from peers rather than parents. When the child becomes a teenager, he is heavily drawn to seeking approval mainly from his peers (teens around the same age). This is stage two indicated in the questions. Our recommendation in our workshops is that parents invest wisely and intelligently in stage one through instilling important Islamic concepts and building a strong bond between them and their children in order to avoid the negative effects of stage two.

Now, to get back to the question where the parents didn't invest properly in stage one and their children are now in stage two. To start with, we would like to emphasize that as Muslims we should never lose hope or feel helpless and despair, no matter the situation. Allah *SWT* says in Qur'an:

"Don't despair or lose hope in the soothing mercy of Allah. Only disbelievers despair and lose hope"[3]

This verse is instructing us to never give up in the face of any problem. We should always exert all our efforts and exhaust all means available to us to try to find a solution for any situation we face.

In the case of parents who neglected to invest properly during the early years of their kids' childhood, when the approval of parents means a lot to children, and now the children are in stage two, it may be more

[3] (Q 12, V87)

difficult to help shape their Islamic identity now, but insha Allah, it can still be done. Here are some recommended actions and tips that could help with this matter:

- Do some serious reading to understand the nature of the stage your teen is going through and to prepare yourself to be able to deal with him/her properly
- Keep a good, strong, and open relationship with your teen and be prepared to deal with him/her now as an adult
- Use every opportunity to express your love and show your genuine concern about the well being of your teen
- Find out something s/he loves or likes to do, learn about it, and make it part of your interests. This will help in opening the channel of communication between you and your teen.
- Support existing community youth groups and help in establishing new ones to make sure that your teen has a forum for entertainment and activities
- Try to surround your teen with a group of good friends who can apply positive peer pressure on him/her
- Allow your teen to participate in decent main stream activities (sports, community services, etc.) However, with this, you should monitor the effect of being part of these activities on your teen's behaviour (use of foul/vulgar language, wrong thoughts, wrong relationships with other gender, etc.)

Q. 4

(a) I have a three year old son and I believe that letting him know Allah and linking him to his Creator is very important in keeping him on the straight path when he gets older. Is it too early to speak to him about Allah? How can I link him to Allah? Please provide me with some practical means to achieve this goal Jazakum Allah Khayran.

(4-b.) How should the concept of God be approached when teaching little children?

Answer

First, we would like to say to our sister: "No it is not too early." As a matter of fact, we should start to link our children to their Creator right from the moment they are born. This is a very important concept for Muslims. It is a continuous process that starts with the birth of the child. The instruction of the prophet, *SAAW*, is to make "*Azan*," the call to prayer, in the right ear of the child, and *Iqamah* in the left ear, right after birth. This way, the first word they hear is the name of Allah. From there on, parents should always make sure that the child is hearing the name of Allah, the recitation of Qur'an, tasbeeh, repetitive prayers, and supplication; even if they are at a very young age and they don't understand the meaning of these actions and words. Parents should have the child present with them in the same place where they make their *jama'a* prayers. Parents could carry the child after he prayer and make the end of prayer *tasbeeh* on the child's hand.

is important for parents to try to present Allah to the child in a positive, rotecting and loving image, and not in a threatening and frightening way.

It is quite unfortunate that some parents always paint a picture of Allah as a punishing God to their children. For example, a mother might tell her child "if you don't do such and such, Allah will put you in hell fire". What's more, some parents may repeat the same threat to the child over and over again. This is the wrong attitude, and paints the wrong picture of Allah to the child. Young children get frightened easily. It is more appropriate and better to talk to them about Allah positively, by saying: "Allah loves you because you helped your sister." Or, "Allah loves you because you perform your prayers."

Parents should help in capitalizing on situations to make the child feel that Allah is helping him or her. For example, if a child misplaces something, parents can use that situation to help the child find the lost item while at the same time saying the prayer for finding a lost item:

"Oh Allah who guides every lost animal, guide me to find my lost subject." Then, when the child finds the lost item (with your help), this will leave a great impact on the child that Allah helps him or her.
Parents should make sure that the child understands that all authority belongs to Allah; and that even parents are subject to His authority. This can only be achieved through leading by example and by practicing what they preach to the child, such as praying, fasting, and being truthful.
Parents should further help create favourable situations for the child to see that others are also subject to Allah's authority and engage in the same types of activities as s/he (ie praying, fasting etc.). This can be achieved by visiting other Muslim families and participating in Mosque activities and Islamic events.

Q. 5

My daughter is 5 years old and she asks me questions almost continuously. Lots of times I feel frustrated and ask her in a nervous voice to stop asking questions. I sometimes even yell and shout, ordering her to stop talking and not to ask about these kinds of things. It looks like this is not working because she is still asking me questions on a continuous basis. My question is: am I doing the right thing telling her to stop asking questions? Also, what should I do if I don't know the answer to her questions?

Answer

When children ask questions, they are trying to learn about things around them and find explanations to situations they don't understand and can't comprehend on their own. Sometimes, children also ask questions to attract their parents' attention and spend more time with them. In other instances, they do this to prove to their parents that they can use the language properly. In all cases, children asking questions may not necessarily be a bad thing. As a matter of fact, it is an opportunity for parents to strengthen the bond with their children and to teach and educate them about good habits and proper Islamic concepts.

As long as the children are asking the questions politely, parents should never tell them to stop asking. They should always try to find the time to answer their children's questions without delay. Even if the children ask the question in an impolite way, this is not an excuse not to spend time with them to answer the question. The proper reaction would be to teach the children the polite way of asking questions and then answer their questions.[4]

See the "Indicate, Educate, and Train" technique on correcting behaviour explained in :tails in our book *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah*, Amana Publications, rst edition, 2003

Refusing to answer our children's questions or trying to stop them from asking questions through yelling and shouting is a negative and unhealthy parental behaviour and should be completely avoided. If parents continue to do this, it could lead to the following undesired results:

- Children may seek answers to their questions from other sources which may not be safe, or could provide the children with wrong answers
- Children may stop asking their parents questions, which would leave parents unaware of what the children are thinking about and, as such, unable to provide them with the proper guidance needed
- The bond between children and parents will become weak. Which may have serious effects particularly when children approach the adolescent stage

Having discussed the above, we believe it is very important that parents give particular attention to their children's questions and try to show genuine interest in their children's concerns. Ignoring our children's questions or ordering them to stop asking will certainly lead to immediate as well as future problems, as such, it should be completely avoided.

As for what the reader should do if she doesn't know the answer to the child's questions. First, let us assure her that this is not a serious issue. The child doesn't know the answer either and is not looking for a detailed answer. The most important thing is that you always give a simple answer that suits the child's age and that you always give factual information. In all situations, always tell the truth and never give false information because you want to avoid answering the question or because the question is embarrassing. We refer the reader to part one of this series "Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on Parenting" Question 42 to see the detailed answer to a common question (Where did I come from?) that is usually asked by children around the age of your daughter.

Also there is nothing wrong in telling the child that you don't know the answer or in directing him/her to ask another trusted person such as his father, uncle, or the Imam of your Islamic Center particularly with questions related to Islam.

I'm an angry father with a very hot temper. I have been trying to change this habit for sometime, however I haven't succeeded so far. I'm really having a hard time changing my bad habits and my negative way of dealing with things. I know that it is harmful and destructive to continue behaving this way, however, as I said, all the previous attempts to change failed miserably. It looks like either I'm using the wrong approach for change, or I'm not strong enough to go through the process of improving and correcting my bad habits. I need your help in two areas:

- *Can I protect my children from picking up these bad habits from me?*
- *How can I change and replace my bad habits with good ones to avoid the negative impact on my children*

Answer

To answer the first part of this question, related to protecting the children from picking up the bad habits of their father, usually, it is very difficult for parents to ask the children to do something while the parents themselves are not doing it or are doing something different. Modeling and leading by example is the most effective way of parenting.[5] Allah *SWT* made Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* our role model to learn from his example. He said:

"Certainly, you have the best model in the person of the messenger of Allah for those who hope in Allah and the Hereafter and engaged in Allah's remembrance a lot."[6] As parents we should try our best to learn from the

[5] Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Beshir; *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic perspective*, amana publications, third edition, 2004, chapter 4

[6] (Q33, V21)

Prophet Muhammad and model the proper behaviour to our children so they can learn from us.

Our children are like small plants that absorb the water they are being watered with. The small plants absorb everything in the water; they don't differentiate between the various minerals dissolved in this water. They don't pick and choose. They just absorb everything. If a harmful mineral is part of the contents of the water, the small plants will certainly absorb it. They don't filter the water and pick out only the good components. Again, they absorb everything. Young children are exactly the same. They pick up everything from the surrounding environment. Because of this, Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* emphasized the importance of environment in many of his sayings.[7]

Based on the above, we feel that it is difficult to protect children from picking up bad habits from their parents, and we feel that parents should try their best to get rid of these habits to be good role models for their children.

Does this mean that every child of parents who have bad habits will grow to have these bad habits as part of his/her personality? Of course the ver is (NO). However, other environmental factors have to be present elp the child to not pick up the bad habits of parents and to pick up d habits from these environmental influences. These factors could be in e form of other adults, who have good habits and behaviour and live and interact closely to the child such as, uncles, teachers, and Imams and other personalities the child meets frequently in Islamic Centers as well as Islamic conventions and conferences. As such, it is very important for parents to make sure that they surround their children with good Muslims and facilitate attending various activities in Mosques and youth centers as well as travel with them occasionally to attend Islamic National conventions and regional conferences.

[7] See chapter 3 of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic perspective*, amana publications, third edition, 2004

As for the second part of this question related to changing parents' bad habits and replacing them with good and positive ones, the process of Self Search for self improvement described in our book *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah.*[8] could be of great help. Here is a summary of the process:

"The origin of Self-Search in Islam is the concept of *mohasabah*. It is a very important concept in Islam and it comes from the following verse:

"Oh you who believe, remain conscious of Allah (have *taqwa*), and let every human being look to what he has sent ahead for the morrow. And once again, remain conscious of Allah (have *taqwa*), for Allah is fully aware of all that you do."[9]

The Prophet *SAAW* also emphasized that we should always assess and evaluate our actions and deeds. In fact, he labeled the person who does not do this as ghafel or a'jez, which means careless, complacent, and unable. Shaddad Ibn Awes *RAA* narrated that the Prophet *SAAW* said:

"A wise person is one who blames himself for his shortcomings and works hard for what comes after death, while a careless and complacent person (ghafel) or unable person (*a'jez*) is one who follows his whims and desires and keeps hoping for the mercy of Allah."[10]

Omar Ibn al-Khattab *RAA* used to say:

"Review, evaluate, and assess yourself before you are assessed. Weigh your deeds before they are weighed against you, and prepare yourself for the day where you will be fully exposed."[11]

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[8] Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Beshir. *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah.* amana Publications, 2004

[9] (Q59, V18)

[10] Ahmad, Ibn Majah, and Termezy

[11] Ahmad

Al-Hassan al-Basry *RAA* used to say:

"Believers observe themselves and maintain their good deeds. They always review, assess, and evaluate their status. Those who do this in life will have an easy time on the Day of Judgment. And those who do not will have a difficult time on the Day of Judgment."[12]

The following is reported in the tablets of Ibraheem:

"A wise person should divide her time into four portions: one portion to supplicate to her Lord, a second portion to review, evaluate, and assess herself, the third portion to reflect upon the creation of Allah, and the fourth portion to work and earn her living."[13]

We should remember that one day we will be fully exposed, as Allah *SWT* says in Surah al-Haqqah:

"On that day, you will be exposed to view, no secret of yours will remain hidden."[14]

Therefore, it is a wise practice for believers to assess and review their actions regularly. Relationships can be enhanced if actions are monitored and changed as soon as faults are discovered. Scholars recommend that rocess of *mohasabah* be implemented to help improve and enhance the of our *taqwa* and closeness to Allah. This process should be done ntly to achieve the best possible results. It requires that parents assess ctions, first as individuals, then together as a couple. They should a list of questions to ask themselves, maybe at the end of the day or he end of the week. This list of questions should cover their daily activ-

[12] Al-Bedaiah Wal-Nehaiah, edition 2.07 for Imam Ismacil Ibn Katheer Al-Demashqy
[13] Ibn Hibban and Hakim
[14] (Q69, V18)

ities with their children, as well as characteristics and behaviours, such as worship and interaction with others. This will help the parents evaluate how good their days are going and discover whether there is room for improvement. The following are examples of questions that their list should include:

- Did I perform my daily prayers on time?
- Did I donate money and charity for the sake of Allah?
- Did I think about what I wanted to say before speaking?
- Did I hurt the feelings of my fellow humans in any way?
- Did I express my love and appreciation for my children and family members?
- Did I thank my spouse for his or her efforts in helping me with the children?
- Did I speak nicely about my family members?
- Did I treat my children kindly?
- Did I.....?

This is just a sample of the questions that we should all ask ourselves to evaluate our performance during a specific day or week. If the answers are positive, we should be thankful to Allah *SWT*. If we realize that there are shortcomings in our performance, we should make a strong commitment to correct our mistakes and perform better in the future.

Parents can do a lot to improve their parenting skills through the Self-Search process. This process helps parents instill certain great qualities in their children that will help them become strong and confident Muslims who can resist the temptations around them. The Self-Search process can also help parents ensure that they themselves have these qualities. If parents do not have positive qualities, they will not be able to instill any in their children. Such qualities can only be acquired through hard work that starts with an honest and sincere **SELF-SEARCH**, to make sure that what parents say and do has the proper impact on their children and supports and

motivates them. It helps children build a strong, balanced, personality, have a positive outlook on life, and be confident that they can have not only a positive impact on their surroundings but also a profound one. With such characteristics, children will be able to take what is good and leave what is bad, and even influence the society they live in. They can steer it in the right direction by exercising proper moral values for their own well-being and for the well-being of the generations to come.

Parents should follow these six steps to implement the Self-Search process:

Search
Evaluate
Acknowledge
Reinforce
Change
Hang on

Search within ourselves and review all the actions and parental behaviours that we use with our children. We must dig deep into our past, thinking back to childhood, and uncover any hidden reasons that might be the source of our parental behaviour. Often, we may be talking to our children in a certain way, and if we stopped to think about it, we would realize that we are doing exactly what our mom or dad used to do with us. The following questionnaire will help us in the **searching** process.

Answer the following questions as best as you can and be honest with yourself.

<u>During my childhood and my teen years:</u>

1. a) I felt that my parents loved me because they told me verbally and through hugs and kisses.

b) My parents didn't say that they loved me and/or they did not hug and kiss me, but I could feel their love indirectly at times.

c) I didn't feel my parents' love and doubted that they loved me at all.

2. a) I felt that my parents were interested in me and that they took my personal affairs seriously, despite their busy schedules.

b) I felt that my parents did not pay much attention to my personal affairs. I often felt like my parents did not treat me as if had a distinct personality from the rest of my siblings.

c) I didn't get any attention at all from my parents.

3. a) I felt my parents' encouragement and support and they helped me whenever they could.

b) I didn't feel my parents' encouragement and support and they didn't help me when they could have.

4. a) I felt my parents' approval and knew that they took my efforts seriously no matter what the results were.

b) I didn't feel my parents' approval unless I took on more than I could handle to meet their expectations.

c) I didn't feel my parents' approval no matter what I did.

5. a) My parents were strict with me and expected me to take on responsibilities.

b) My parents were not always strict with me and did not always expect me to take on responsibilities.

c) My parents were never strict with me and didn't expect me to do anything.

6. a) My parents often compared me with my siblings or other kids we knew, which made me very sad.

b) My parents appreciated me as I was.

7. Write the name of someone who had a positive effect on you during your childhood and growing years.

8. Is this person one of your parents?

9. Write the name of someone who had a negative effect on you during your childhood and growing years.

10. Is this person one of your parents?

Evaluate the actions and sayings we use in dealing with our children. Which of these actions are positive, supportive, and based on Islamic values and teachings, and which of these actions are negative, unsupportive, and have no basis in Islamic teachings? An example of a negative action is when we, as parents, try to resolve a conflict with our child while we are angry. If we yell, shout, and fight with the child just to vent our anger, we are using a negative parental behaviour. However, if we control our anger by using the anger management techniques prescribed to us by our beloved Prophet *SAAW*, teach our child to do the same, and then discuss the problem calmly, we are using a positive parental behaviour. More examples of positive and negative parental behaviours can be found in our book *Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah*. The following is another questionnaire that will help in the process of evaluation.

Please answer the following questions with "yes" or "no."

As a parent:

1. I feel that I had little experience with my first child. This caused me to be too strict or too lenient with him or her.

2. I expect perfection from myself when I am with my children and I often feel like a failure when I can't do the perfect thing.

3. I feel that cleaning the house and preparing the food is more important than playing with my children or taking them to the park.

4. I don't often let my children try certain things that I think are difficult, because I wasn't able to do them when I was a child.

5. I feel that I'm raising my children in the same way that my parents raised me, despite the difference in time and place. This is because I don't know of a better way to raise them.

6. The way I treat my children shows that I don't have confidence in their ability to do things.

7. I let my children make simple decisions that are specific to them and reasonable for their age.

8. I feel that the stress and new responsibilities of adapting to a new environment, as an immigrant, are a heavy burden on my spouse and I. They don't leave us enough time to meet the needs and wants of our children.

Acknowledge our findings after we answer the above questions, and categorize them as either positive or negative behaviours. Again, the positive ones are those that agree with Islamic teachings, are suitable for the environment, and help our children become strong and confident Muslims. The negative behaviours are those that are mainly from inherited tradition, have no basis in Islamic teachings, may not be suitable for the environment, and may make our children feel defeated as Muslims. Acknowledging our strengths and weaknesses is the first step in improving our parental behaviour. After that, we have to put our trust in Allah *SWT* and make a commitment to positive change. Changing unhealthy habits is the key to success, as the great scholar, Ibn al-Qayyim said:

"And the core of the matter is in leaving out the unhealthy, inherited habits."

Reinforce the positive parental behaviours and keep practicing them with our children. If they work, we must continue using them.

Change the negative parental behaviours and replace them with positive

ones. We have to work hard at this because change does not come easily. It takes hard work to change habits, so we have to be patient and keep trying. Changing bad habits into good ones is worth the struggle. The expected benefits in our children's development are too important for us not to try our best to change these habits. When trying to change our bad habits or negative parenting behaviour, we should follow the advice of the Prophet *SAAW* and always perform *salat-ul-hajah*, the prayer of need, and make *du'a* intensively, to help us in the process of trying to become a better parent. In addition, we must repeat this prayer a few times, rather than just performing it once.

Hang On: We cannot give up right away. We should put our trust in Allah and keep trying. As parents, we can learn new ways and improve on our old ways. The positive results will be certain if we follow the above steps. It may take longer than we think, but we can't give up. The reward will be tremendous if we work hard and make a sincere effort to become better parents.

Finally, we would like to remind parents that changing behaviour is a long process that requires patience, endurance, persistence, and sincerity. It is something that takes time to achieve. You may have to go through this process a few times, but don't give up. Set a reasonable goal for yourself, try your best to achieve it gradually, put your trust in Allah, pray often, and make a lot of *du'a* asking for His support. The results, *insha'Allah*, will be certain."

Q. 7

My daughter is seven years old. She is a good child who tries to do her best in everything. Sometimes she wants to do something that is hard for her age. She says Bismillah "In the name of Allah" and expects that it will get done. Other times she wishes for things to happen that she likes and wants badly. She makes Du'a for them to happen. When they don't happen she feels let down and asks; "How come Allah didn't listen to my Du'a?" What should I tell her when she asks such questions?

Answer

This is a very good question and parents should welcome these types of questions from their children. As a matter of fact, parents should encourage their children to ask questions because in every question asked, there is a great opportunity for parents to instil certain Islamic concepts in their children's hearts, minds and souls. These concepts are of immense significance in shaping their personalities. Let us see what concepts we can talk about with our children when they ask such questions:

- The concept of *Du'a* in Islam.
- The concept of universal laws created by Allah *SWT*
- The concept of cause and effect, the law of consequences
- Etc.

When your daughter asks you this question it is your duty to use this opportunity to explain to her the proper understanding of the above concepts.

For example, when explaining the proper understanding of *Du'a*, parents have to make sure that the child understands the following:

- *Du'a* is an act of worship first and foremost. Allah *SWT* instructed us to worship him via making *Du'a*.
- We are rewarded for making *Du'a* with the proper intention
- Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* taught us various *Du'as* to say on

different occasions and at different times of the day and night, such as when we wake up in the morning, before we eat our meals, when we leave our house, when we put on a new dress, when we look in the mirror, when we use the washroom, when we ride any means of transportation such as cars or planes, when we are blessed with a baby and so on.

• Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* also taught us that Allah *SWT* could respond to our *Du'a* in the following three ways:[15]

– Answer the *Du'a* immediately and grant us our request without delay

– Remove certain difficulties or harmful things that could have happened to us without the *Du'a*

– Not grant us our wish immediately in this life, but reserve a greater reward for us in the Hereafter with this *Du'a*

Also, as a parent, you have to explain the laws of nature created by Allah to your daughter. Allah *SWT* told us that to get certain results in any area of our lives, we have to work for these results. No one would get good marks on his/her exam without studying the subject of the exam very well no matter how much *Du'a* s/he makes. No one would pass a driving test without spending hours of training on how to drive a car no matter how much *Du'a* s/he makes. As such, it is not enough to say "In the name of Allah" or to make *Du'a* to get our wishes fulfilled and our needs granted. We have to work to achieve the desired results. This is part of the universal laws that Allah created and no one is above these laws. Every action we do and every move we make has its own consequences. We have to live with these consequences because we are responsible for our actions. We have to exert our efforts and exhaust our means in the area of concern, and then we seek the help of Allah through making *Du'a*, asking Him to grant us the results we are hoping for. This is the proper way for Muslims: hard work associated with seeking Allah's help via *Du'a*. *Du'a* alone won't work. Just saying "In the name of Allah" alone won't work, because this is the universal law and no one is above Allah's laws.

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15. "The *Du'a* of the Messenger", Abd Allah Haggag, Alhelal Library, Byroot, Lebanon, 1986

Q. 8

What are proper and improper ways of disciplining a child? Can you give examples?

Answer This is a very good question. We are glad that the reader is talking about disciplining the child, not about punishing. Discipline is a much more comprehensive word than punishment. It encompasses many elements such as linking the child to Allah, understanding the child's needs and qualities, knowing the critical factors involved in shaping the child's personality, emphasizing positive action, etc.[16] Punishment only occupies a very small portion of the discipline spectrum. Having said this, here is, in point form, the elements of what we consider proper and improper ways of discipline:

Improper

- Physical punishment
- Yelling and shouting
- Inconsistency
- Not teaching proper behaviour
- Disciplinary method not related to the mistake you're trying to correct
- Disciplinary method leads to low self esteem

If any of the above elements is contained in the disciplining mechanism used with the child, we consider it improper.

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[16] See Chapter two and chapter four of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective* for more ways of discipline

Proper

- Teaches and trains for proper behaviour
- Doesn't create gap or hostile feelings between children and parents
- Strengthens the bond between children and parents
- Is related to the mistake being corrected
- Is consistent
- Leads to higher self esteem
- Contains elements to help ensure success, such as:
  - Follow up
  - Simple to apply
  - Applied fairly among all children when the same mistake is committed
- Older children are part of any decision-making process.

When the above elements are contained in the disciplining mechanism, we consider it proper.

Here is a practical example of a common situation as narrated by one of our daughters, who was 14 years old at the time of the incident:

"I remember once being punished for not using my time wisely. At that time, I felt it was almost unfair to be banned from TV for two weeks, but now I realize how important it was that I learned my lesson. My sister and I had been watching TV for two straight hours and hadn't yet prayed Maghrib. When my mother found out she told us to go and pray. When we finished our prayer, she asked: what do you think we should do to avoid such a thing from happening again? We agreed that we should be punished. She asked again: what kind of punishment do you think would help you to remember next time that prayer time should be respected and nothing should prevent you from praying on time? I suggested that we should be deprived of our allowance and my sister suggested that we could be deprived of our weekend treat.[17]

[17] This is a family tradition that every weekend, the kids are being rewarded by a certain treat of their own because of being good during the week

Mom said: these are good, but I have another suggestion that I think would work better in this case. I think you shouldn't be allowed to watch TV for a specified period. Do you want me to suggest the length of the period or do you want to do so? How long do you think this period should be? My sister and I talked together and came up with a period of two weeks. Mom agreed with us that we couldn't watch TV for two weeks, and that was our punishment. During these two weeks, my Mom monitored us closely and made sure that we didn't turn the TV on. During this time period though, both my parents gave me the support I needed and treated me normally. It was only I who could feel the consequences, because my parents' attitude towards me was as it always was. I think this punishment worked because it wasn't too harsh but at the same time it was still firm and appropriate for the situation. The punishment was more of a natural consequence because it was directly related to my ill-doing."

You note in this example that it almost meets all the requirements indicated above for the proper disciplining approach. It taught the children the proper behaviour, it was related to the mistake being corrected, the children, since they were teens, were consulted on the type of punishment used, and during the punishment period, parents respected the children and treated them kindly to ensure that the punishment did not create a hostile attitude from the children toward the parents, or widen the gap between them. The execution of the discipline mechanism was also closely followed up, and most importantly, it was done in a calm and dignified way to ensure that it had no negative impact on the teens' self esteem.

Environment

I Our children live here in North America where the culture is completely different from the eastern culture. How do we fuse the two contrasting cultures of the West and the East?

Answer The reader shouldn't be concerned about infusing the eastern culture in her children. She should rather be highly concerned about instilling Islamic concepts in the hearts, minds, and souls of her children. Not all eastern cultures are Islamic and agree with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. Some aspects of them are, while others are not. As Muslims we should promote those aspects of the eastern culture that have their roots in Islamic teachings and completely reject those parts that go against Islamic teachings. There is also a third type of eastern culture, one that is neutral. It doesn't contradict Islamic values nor does it support them. This part of the culture should be tested in the new environment we are living in. If it works, we can use it. If it doesn't provide the required results for raising our children, no one can force us to use it just because it is part of the eastern culture.

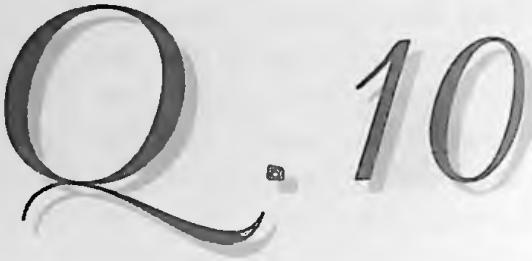
The same goes for the western culture. We shouldn't paint all aspects of the western culture with the same brush. There are good parts to the western culture that don't contradict Islamic values or go against our moral teachings such as respecting hard work, placing a high value on utilizing our time wisely (being punctual), and emphasizing the importance of organization to name a few. These values should be adopted and implemented by us. After all, we were told by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*; "Good practices and actions are the goal of a believer, wherever he/she finds them, he/she is the most deserving of using them"[18]

[18] Al Termezy

On the other hand, there are many aspects of the western culture that go against our Islamic values, like drinking, drugs, gambling, pre-marital sex, etc. These practices should be completely avoided by Muslims, and parents should make it very clear to their children not to engage in such activities just because others in this society are engaging in them. Our main references are the orders of the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. We should check every practice against them. If the practice agrees with them, there is no harm in doing it. If it contradicts them, we should fully avoid it. Of course, this is easier said than done. Because of this, it is very important and crucial for parents to work with their children on the following fronts:

- Instill important Islamic concepts in the mind, heart, and soul of your child as early as possible. See the answer to question number 3a and 3b in the first section of this book for the importance of starting early with your children when your approval is still the most important thing to them
- Work with the community (Islamic centers, youth centers, etc.) to establish positive and healthy activities that can be shared by our teens and occupy their time in a clean environment to help them avoid negative aspects of the western culture
- Be choosy and selective when you allow your teen/child to participate in main stream activities and monitor the effects of this participation on his/her behaviour
- Evaluate the situation periodically, and reconsider your decision if you notice a negative impact on your child's behaviour
- Don't generalize. Try to find out and assess the advantages and disadvantages of each activity and situation separately. Make your decisions with objectivity after considering the merits of each circumstance and condition.

The above are some tips to help parents train their children to integrate intelligently in the western culture and to make sure that they are benefiting from its positive aspects and avoiding the negative ones.



What is the main difference between parenting here, in the West, and parenting "there", in the East? Is this difference still prominent, as our Eastern societies are becoming more and more Western?

Answer

Although Eastern societies may be turning more and more Western because of the impact of Satellite TV Channels and the huge effect of Western programs being aired in Eastern societies, there are still basic differences between both societies, particularly in the area of raising children. These differences are mainly in the area of environment. As it was indicated by Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* in many of his teachings,[19] the environment has a huge and serious impact on forming a child's personality. Let us discuss in detail some of these environmental aspects that are causing this difference between raising children in the West compared to raising children in countries where Muslims are the majority:

- **TV programs**

  – Although the number of Western TV programs are increasing in the line up of most TV providers in Eastern countries, almost all TV providers in those countries also carry many specialized channels promoting clean Islamic values. This is not available in Western societies except on a very limited basis in certain areas of North America and Europe. These specialized channels, no doubt benefit parents in many ways by: portraying Islam

[19] See chapter three of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic Perspective* third edition, 2004, by amana publications

properly, refuting certain misconceptions about Islam, and teaching various positive and healthy ways in dealing with children. Such opportunities are not available on a large scale for parents in the West. Parents living in North America and Europe have to exert a deliberate effort to acquire this knowledge. It is not readily available to them on TV programs, as is the case for parents who live in majority Muslim countries. In the West, parents have to travel and attend conventions to acquire such knowledge.

- **Mosques and The call for Prayers (*Adhan*)**

  – The presence of Mosques on almost every street and each corner of any city, town, or village in majority Muslim countries no doubt has a wonderful positive effect on Muslims in general and children in particular. The *Adhan* (call to prayer) can be heard regularly everywhere the child turns. Mosques have spread to every corner of the city, with scholars who are available to teach and answer questions almost 24 hours a day. Religious occasions are celebrated openly/publicly. Parents are not shy to identify with Islam, etc. On the whole, the atmosphere is very encouraging, peaceful, and supportive of anyone who chooses to adhere to and practice Islamic values (of course exceptions do exist, as in the harassment of dedicated Muslim groups by some governments). Not only are all of the above supportive enhancers absent from the life of Muslims in the North American environment, but furthermore, Muslims in these environments face additional negative stressors. These stressors are continuously being applied on Muslims or minorities, severely affecting children.

- **Peer pressure and popular teen culture**

  – This is one of the major differences between parenting in the West and parenting in majority Muslim countries, especially when parenting teens. Teens are in the second stage of approval seeking, where they are looking for the approval of their peers

and want to feel that they fit in, and that they are part of the main stream culture.

– The popular teen culture in the West calls for and emphasizes individuality, fulfilling desires, physical indulgence, following fashions, short-term gratification, and challenging authority represented in elders, teachers, and parents. Muslim parents try to instill Islamic values in their children. These Islamic values call for strong family ties, spiritual nourishment, carrying out duties, thinking about this life and the hereafter, and respecting authority.

– It is very clear that the popular teen culture in the West is almost completely the opposite of what Muslim parents want for their children. This represents a huge source of pressure for Muslim parents and Muslim teens living in the West.[20]

– There is no doubt that Muslims living in majority Muslim countries are not faced with the same type of pressure, or to say the least, with the same level of pressure when it comes to popular teen culture.

- **Religious holiday pressure:**

  – This type of pressure on Muslim parents living in the West and on Muslim children is not permanent by nature. It takes place periodically during the celebration of certain religious holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, which are observed by predominantly Christian North American and European societies.

  – Christmas time, by far, is a leading cause of pressure and stress for Muslim children. They are usually being bombarded by a series of questions from their peers as to why they are not celebrating Christmas: "It's lots of fun! Why don't you have a decorated Christmas tree at your house?", "You mean to say you're not getting presents in the holiday season?!", "So, why are you taking Christmas

[20] For detailed comparison between Popular teen's culture in the west and Islamic values, please refer to chapter 2 of our book *Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope* 2nd edition, amana publications, 2004

vacation if you are not celebrating it?", "You don't believe in Jesus?", "You're not having a big turkey for Christmas dinner?", "You are not writing a letter to Santa?"...etc.

– Similar questions are usually repeated during Easter. However, Christmas time is considered the worst for pressure, due to the commercial nature that color the celebration and the continuous media coverage, advertisements and the lengthy period of celebration.

– Again, unless parents neutralize the pressure caused by religious holidays to help children understand and cope with the situation, they form a great source of pressure on children and may have a serious impact on their upbringing.

– This type of pressure does not exist for Muslims living in majority Muslim countries.

- **Youth clubs and outlets**

  – One of the major problems for our teens and youth living in North America and Europe is how to spend their time engaged in clean, healthy, and entertaining activities.

  – Great numbers of Muslim teens in the West spend/waste their time surfing the internet, watching TV and movies, and playing video games. These types of activities are neither healthy, nor do they teach good skills. As a matter of fact, the majority of them promote violence and hostile attitudes towards others.

  – Recently, some Muslim communities in the West have established youth centers to overcome this problem. However, these centers are very limited and don't meet the needs or accommodation capacity of the great number of Muslim youth in need of such services.

  – Youth clubs and youth groups are popular in majority Muslim countries and provide invaluable services to this age group, engaging them in clean sports competitions, as well as other useful and healthy activities.

- **Harmonious society**

  In majority Muslim countries, the social behaviour of the general public is usually harmonious, homogeneous, and accepted by the rest of the society. Also, Islamic behaviour enhancers are plenty and constitute a great part of the support system for children. For example, there is always something related to Islam and its basic principles in the various media sources (books, newspapers, radio, and television). Also, Qur'anic recitation and Islamic subjects are always aired and discussed on radio and TV.

Q. 11

Nowadays, our kids spend a long time in front of their computers surfing the internet, and it is difficult to ask them not to spend such a long time on the internet. What can we do to make sure that they are not getting into bad sites and watching unacceptable material? Also, in your view, what are the effects of the internet on children?

Answer

First of all, let us agree that the internet is now a part of life for most people living in North America, and that the number of people who use it is increasing exponentially day after day for obvious reasons. It is a good tool for research, it is fast, and it can be used for many beneficial things in various areas of life. Simply put, it is a beautiful and efficient tool for research and communication for those who wish to use it as such. At the same time, like any other tool, the internet can be misused and the results of misusing it, particularly for young children, can be devastating. Because young children are vulnerable, they can easily get into trouble via internet use. As such, it is the parent's responsibility to do everything possible to protect their children from falling victims to any of the internet's many black holes. Here are some tips to help parents in this task:

- Parents should explain to children that the use of the internet is a privilege, not a right
- Establish a user agreement with your children and get them to sign it. Take your time discussing with your children the various terms of the contract as well as the different uses of the internet and the consequences of misusing it (getting into bad sites or

communicating with strangers over the internet). Make use of the model behaviour contract in chapter 9 of our book "Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope, Practical Parenting Guide." Parents should stick to the consequences established in this contract and be consistent in applying them

• Monitor computer usage and limit online time. Be aware of your child's need to use the computer for homework, research, and try to estimate how long it might take. Just sitting in front of the computer surfing the internet without a specific purpose, should not be permitted

• Make sure that the computer is placed in a common area of the house, not in the private rooms of the kids

• Have an old computer, with only word processing capability (no internet access), for children to use in their own bedroom. Children can do their internet research on the main computer located in a common area of the house, collect the needed information, copy it on a CD, then use this CD on the word processor computer in their rooms to finish their homework

• Invest in a software that blocks access to bad internet sites

Q. 12

How do you know if your child is undergoing (or maybe being effected by?) peer pressure and not telling you? Are there any particular signs to watch for?

Answer

Some signs that may indicate that your child is being influenced by/experiencing peer pressure are:

- Being bored and complaining that he/she doesn't know what to do with his/her time
- Watching a lot of TV
- Getting into fights with his/her siblings for no obvious reason
- Avoiding doing his/her homework or delaying it, and procrast
- Isolating him/herself
- In some extreme cases he/she may indicate that he/she hates school and doesn't want to go to school

However, when parents invest in the early years of their children by creating an open channel of communication, they can avoid such problems. The children usually open up to them and inform the parents of what is going in their life outside home.

A few factors that help in keeping a good, open channel of communication with your children are:

- ***Train yourself to be an active listener***: As explained in our book "Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective", this means:

LISTEN
to the verbal messages and the body language of your children. Less than 20% of what is understood comes from the actual words used. We respond far more to tone of voice, eye contact, facial expressions, body position, etc. (videotaping some family time together, with the permission of everyone involved, can be informative.)

REFLECT
(i.e. repeat back) what you believe your teen was saying and feeling without judging or trying to solve the problem. Allow the teen to elaborate.

CLARIFY
whether your understanding is correct or whether you have misinterpreted. Are there important details that you have overlooked?

EMPATHIZE
by trying to put yourself in the other person's position. It may help to try to recall a similar incident you have experienced. Tell your teen you understand and care about how he/she feels.

Remember, if your teen asks and seems to want help in dealing with a particular situation, then you may try to SOLVE THE PROBLEM by asking her what he/she thinks might help and if there is anything you can do. Be careful; don't impose the idea on your teen. Make a suggestion, and give your teen the choice to accept or reject it.

This sort of effective listening will not only ensure that you really hear what your teen is saying, it will signal to him/her that you can accept and understand all those other things he/she has wanted to share, and the real communication will begin.

When your teen feels that you're keen to listen to him and suspend your judgment as you do, he will be more attentive when you try to advise him on something or provide him with certain guidance. He will try his best to understand and implement the guidance given. This will help him eventually reach the stage of conviction, where he internalizes the advice, guidance and values given as his own.

• **Provide a warm, cozy family atmosphere.** An atmosphere that is filled with love, mercy, kindness, leniency, and gentleness encourages open communication between children and parents. In this kind of environment, children usually don't hide information from their parents because they feel their parent's love and know from the bottom of their hearts that their parents genuinely care for their well being and are ready to help them with any problem they may have.

Be involved in the life of your child. Make sure you visit her school, attend parent-teacher meetings, contact her teacher to ask about how she is doing, and offer to volunteer with class activities. This way, you will be able to detect if your child is under peer pressure.

Q. 13

My child, who is a teenager, is always asking me to buy him expensive brand name clothing. He says he's not less than other children so he should be able to wear what they wear. I always give in and end up buying them for him because the peer pressure. Am I doing the right thing or is there a better way of handling this issue?

Answer

This is a common problem and no doubt has to do with the environment our children are living in as well as the peer pressure they face. Teenagers highly value the views and approval of their peers. They like to dress like them, talk like them, walk like them etc. They don't want to be singled out of the group and looked at as different. One of the symptoms of wanting to fit in comes in the form of brand name clothing. Of course giving in to your teens' desire is not the solution, but at the same time, completely refusing to buy him the brand name item he wants is not the solution either. Here is a real example of how we dealt with this issue as described by one of our daughters when she was teenager. We trust that this example will help the reader in coming to terms with the "Brand Name" issue and provide some useful insight in reasoning and anger control, which could work wonders when it comes to dealing with teens.

Here is the example:

I stared longingly at the green and white Adidas jacket hanging in the store window. It looked really comfortable and the word "Adidas" printed across it diagonally was so strategically placed. I thought about how nice that Adidas jacket would look on me. I was in grade seven at the

time and almost all my classmates wore some sort of brand name item at least from time to time. Brand names are always going to be around bombarding a teenager. In the younger years, they're Adidas, Nike, or Fila; as you grow older, they change to Gap, Guess, Tommy Hilfiger, Club Monaco, Jacob, Old Navy etc. Before my eyes met this jacket, I really hadn't thought or cared much for brand names, but I had started to notice all my friends' wardrobes changing to accommodate brand names. Now I even knew this one girl who had Nike jewellery as well as the jacket, pants and shoes. Seriously, this girl had Nike earrings and a Nike ring. I decided to ask my parents if they could buy me the jacket as a present, for Eid. However there was one problem, this spring jacket was somewhere in the vicinity of $60, which was probably more money then my parents had ever paid for one of their spring jackets and I was only 13! My parents had always stressed the importance of being careful and responsible with your money, no matter how rich or poor you might be. They often mentioned the Prophet Muhammad PBUH's hadeeth about how we will be accountable for how we used the blessings that Allah has endowed us with, including money. At dinner that evening, I told my parents about the jacket that, to me, appeared so beautiful and asked them if they could buy it for me as my Eid present as Eid was soon approaching. And then the inevitable question was popped: they wanted to know how much this wonderful Adidas jacket cost and I dreaded having to respond. Very hesitantly, I answered "Umm...sixty dollars."

I braced myself, Oh no! Were they going to yell at me for even suggesting such a crazy thing, wasting $60 on a spring jacket when that money could most definitely be put to much better use. Well, no such response came. On the contrary, my parents were actually very calm as they explained to me that $60 was a lot of money and that it was probably that much just because it was a brand name jacket. But that response was not enough for me; it didn't satisfy that inner craving and desire for the jacket. The response was absolutely logical but I didn't want logic at that

time. I wanted that beautiful Adidas jacket that hung so nicely in the store window.

My parents could tell I was not convinced and I told them that I really wanted that jacket. I don't quite know why it was so important to me then. Maybe it was because all my friends had some brand name clothes and to me that jacket represented a sense of belonging or maybe I just really liked the jacket. Whatever it was, it wasn't going away and my parents realized that. My mom put the time and effort in to make the trip to the store with me and take a look at this jacket that she'd heard so much about. This was very important to me because it showed that my feelings and needs (though this was not a need per say) mattered to her. She cared about my desires, as absurd as they may be, and didn't make me feel bad about them. In the back of my mind, though I didn't want to admit it to myself, I knew that buying that jacket would be a waste of money and that I could get a non-brand name jacket of the same quality for half the price of this one. But did that matter to me at the time? Did that really matter to me as a 13 year old girl in junior high school? The jacket to me was a halal way of fitting in, of not standing out too much from the rest of my friends since there were already many things I did and wore differently that set me apart from the rest. My mother seemed to understand why I wanted this expensive jacket so badly. She explained, however, that brand names don't increase the worth of a person but that if I wanted it so badly, I must contribute to its cost. So we made a deal that we'd split the cost. My parents would pay for half of the jacket as a present for me for Eid and I would pay for the other half. Now, I paid for some of it using money from my allowance but you must remember that I was only 13 and I wasn't exactly swimming in money. So my mother told me that I could do extra work around the house to pay for my share of the jacket.

So I worked, I cleaned, I washed, I scrubbed, I fixed, all for my wonderful

jacket. Through my labors, I understood the value of money and I realized that it was really something not to be taken for granted, no matter how much of it you had. I developed an appreciation for the work my father did everyday, and he had much more to pay for than half the price of my Adidas jacket. When I had finally earned enough money, I went out and bought the jacket. Excited, I wore it to school the next day, but I realized that having a brand name printed across my back was not going to help me be a better person.

Ultimately, Adidas didn't care if I was the most or least popular girl at school, they just wanted my money. My friends didn't treat me any differently because now I had an Adidas jacket, sure I got a few compliments about my new jacket here and there but Adidas did not make me any nicer, smarter, or funnier – that was up to me."

Q. 14

We used to live in a large metropolitan area where Muslims are great in number and are well established in terms of the number of Islamic and youth centers available. We have three children: two boys and one girl, all in their early teens. They were very active with other Muslim teens in the youth center, playing sports and participating in various activities. Recently, because of my husband's career, we had to move to a small town in another state. The number of Muslim families in this town is very small and they only have a small place for Salat and no other activities. The closest large Islamic center is about one hour and a half drive from where we live. We try our best to make the trip once every two weeks on the weekends to give our children the opportunity to use the facilities in this Islamic center and to mix and play with other Muslim teens. This is not easy on us, but we try our best because our children really look forward to these visits. Occasionally, we may miss going on the trip for one reason or another, which leaves our children frustrated considering that during the week they are not participating in any activities. Our children are neither part of any extracurricular activities in their state schools now, nor do they participate in any local main stream programs because we fear that they may pick up some bad habit from these activities. Are we doing the right thing not allowing them to participate in main stream activities?

Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer

There is no doubt that parents in North America have to be very careful of the type of environment their children are exposed to and interacting with. The environment plays a very crucial

role in shaping the personality of our children and, as such, we were warned by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* in many of his sayings about the impact of the environment.[21] As a matter of fact, it is the responsibility of parents to make sure they surround their children with a healthy environment that will have a positive impact on their development. It is encouraging to see that this family tried their best to do this for their children while they were living in the metropolitan city, as well as when they moved to the small town. These trips every other weekend are not easy and require planning and a deliberate effort from parents which is to be commended.

However, surrounding our children with a good environment doesn't mean that we isolate them from the society they are living in for the following reasons:

- The Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* told us that "A believer who mixes with people and endures any harm they cause him has a greater reward than a believer who doesn't mix with people and doesn't endure the harm they cause him"[22]
- The Qur'an also encourages us to be kind and deal justly with our community, even if they are not Muslims, as long as they don't fight us because of our religion: "Allah doesn't forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion nor drove you out of your homes. Verily Allah loves those who deal with equity"[23]
- Muslims are an integral part of the North American community now. They have to contribute to the well being of their community and find the proper way to be part of the main stream society without compromising their values.

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[21] See chapter three of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, an Islamic Perspective*, third edition, amana publications.

[22] Ibn Magah

[23] (Q60, V8)

• Main stream activities are mainly funded by taxpayers. As Muslims we are part of this pool of resources and should also benefit from various main stream programs.

Having established this main principle that we are an integral part of the community, here are some guidelines to observe and keep in mind to help ensure safe and healthy participation for ourselves and our children:

• Not all mainstream activities are equal and not all mainstream groups are evil. As a matter of fact, most of them try their best to have their children engage in healthy and useful programs that would help their development and progress.

• Do your research and find out who is running what programs for youth in your locality. Public libraries and local officials are good sources of information in this area. Also talk to your neighbors and consult with them about the activities available in your area.

• Always pick the programs that are most beneficial to your children and are run by reputable individuals or groups.

• Try to enroll your children in programs before the start date so they won't feel like strangers when they join an activity that has already been running for some time and where participants already know each other well and may have formed their own friends and groups within the activity.

• If you don't find a suitable program for your teens and you have an idea for one that may benefit them, don't shy away from approaching those responsible for these programs to suggest starting one. Be willing to put the time to work out a plan to convince those in charge that it is an activity worth trying.

• In certain cases, you may need to ask your local representative to help you in starting these new programs. For example, if you feel the need for a ladies/girls only swimming time within the public swimming facilities, you can approach officials to start

such a program to accommodate this need for the whole community, not only for Muslims.

Meanwhile there are a few areas that you have to work on with your children to help them get the best out of the main stream programs without compromising any of their values. Here are some of these areas:

- Instill the proper values in your children and make sure they are proud of their identity as Muslims. This is not an easy task. It requires a lot of effort from parents.[24]
- Teach them how to interact with various situations and have a positive effect on their environment, rather than being effected negatively by the environment. This is closely linked to the above point about having a strong and confident Muslim Personality.
- Monitor and evaluate the effect of enrolling them in these main stream activities on their behaviour to make sure that there are no negative influences on them from being part of these activities. For example, monitor things such as the language they use (do they start to use foul, immodest language or swear words?), the way they respond to elders (are they respectful or do they show rudeness and disrespect?), the way they view famous singers, actors and athletes (ie do they seem to look up to negative famous figures whose actions go against Islamic values?), the way they deal with and talk about the opposite gender (ie do they email, or chat online with members of the opposite gender, or talk to them in a too-friendly manner?) etc.
- Adjust and modify your plans based on the results of your continuous follow up on the effects of the programs on your children's behaviour. Be prepared to make difficult decisions that may not be popular with your children.

[24] See the answer of the first question in this book to help you building confident and proud Muslim personality in your kids

Young Children

Q. 15

My two year old son is giving me a hard time. He has many problems I would like you to help me with. The first problem is related to him hitting me occasionally. I don't know how to stop this behaviour. Can you provide me with suggestions on how to stop this behaviour? The second problem is related to his sleeping habits. He doesn't want to sleep in his bed alone. He always wants to sleep in our room, and if I put him in his room he cries non stop so I end up bringing him back to our room. I would appreciate very much your help in these areas.

JAK

Answer

Regarding your son hitting you or others, this is a common behaviour for some two year old boys for one reason or another. However, if you don't deal with this behaviour, it is not going to be good for him now or later. Every time he does this you should deal with it very consistently. Don't let it happen a few times until you are frustrated at which point you scream or yell at him. Consistency is very important for these kinds of problems.

Here is how to deal with it:

Whenever he hits you, hold his hand gently but firmly, look him in the eyes, and say in a serious and assertive voice, but without yelling or shouting: "This hurts. Don't hit any body." Then tell him to say "I'm sorry" and get him to kiss you where he hit you. If you are consistent in doing this he will

learn that hitting hurts people and this behaviour should stop within a couple of months or so. We can't over emphasize the importance of being consistent, gentle but assertive when dealing with this matter.

Regarding your son sleeping in your bed rather than in his bed, we suggest the following:

You should decide on a bed time and try to be regular and consistent in following that time. A nighttime routine can help your son be ready to go to sleep with ease. About a half an hour to an hour before his bedtime, start getting your son ready to go to bed (that may mean feeding, bathing or washing him, and spending some time playing quietly with him with building blocks for example, or looking at a book with him). Then put your son in his bed and lie down next to him, reading Qur'an while putting your hand over his forehead or wiping over his head and body. After that you can play a tape or a C.D. of Quran recitation in his room and stay in the room with him quietly until he falls asleep, at which point you can leave the room quietly. Follow this routine for a while until he gets comfortable with sleeping in his own bed (it could take anywhere from two weeks up to a couple of months).

We also suggest that you use a baby monitor in his room. This will help you be aware if your son wakes up and cries in the middle of the night. If you hear him cry for about a minute, you should go to his room, put your hand on his head, kiss him, read him Qur'an in a steady, calm voice, comfort him and perhaps offer him a sip of water until he falls back asleep. Then go back to your room. You can also play the same Qur'anic tape at a low volume and leave it running. This way, rather than waiting until he comes to your room crying and then having a hard time getting him back to his room, you take care of him in his room to help him get into the habit of sleeping in his bed the whole night.

It is very important to make sure that the baby has had enough food during the day and is not hungry at bedtime. Make sure that you don't feed him something heavy before bedtime as it may make him thirsty and cause him to wake up frequently because he needs to drink.

After he gets used to sleeping this way (maybe after a month or two), you should be able to put him in his bed and read him Qur'an for a while, then leave the room even before he is asleep. He may cry for a while in the beginning, but as long as you are sure he is clean and fed, don't worry about him crying. He will fall asleep after a while insha Allah. You should continue to follow the same routine described above with the exception of having to lie next to him. A tape recorder playing Qur'anic recitation in is room can also help him.

ain, I would like to emphasize that consistency, staying calm but firm, id assertiveness when applying this is very important. For example, even if he runs out of the bed or the room, bring him back by gently pulling him if need be, without yelling or shouting at him or uttering such things as: "You're a bad boy, you're making me tired etc." Rather, you should say encouraging words such as: "You are a good boy and you will listen to mom and sleep in your bed."

In addition to the above, you should also make *Du'a* regularly and ask Allah to help you.

We know that this method usually works very well. Please keep in touch and let us know how it worked for you.

Q. 16

My son is a year and eight months old. I want to wean him off of breast milk. What is the best way of doing this? When he was one years old, I limited my breast feeding to nights only. Currently, he eats solid foods during the day. However, I'm not necessarily sure if he eats enough solid foods for his age. I breast feed him before he goes to bed and if he wakes up during the night. Usually he wakes up twice during the night. Sometimes he wakes up three times during the night.

JAK

Answer

It looks like your son doesn't get enough food/milk during the day and that is why he wakes up frequently during the night. At one years old, when you limited your breast feeding to nights only, you should have given him another feeding of milk by bottle or cup during the day.

Now what you could do is get him used to drinking milk from a cup (it could be a baby cup) for a month or two before you stop breast feeding him fully. When you are fully weaning him off of nursing, it will help that someone else be the one who gives him the last cup of milk before bed so he doesn't smell your milk and reject the bottle).

There is no easy way to avoid the baby crying for your breast milk when he is being weaned, but usually the child gets over it in a matter of a few days to a week. One idea that could help is to get him out of the house during the day time to a place where he has an opportunity to be active, move around, and run so he can fall asleep more easily at night.

Most moms need to drink and eat less when they stop breastfeeding. They also need to get involved in activities that consume their energy to exhaust them so that the body would stop producing milk. There are other ideas to help moms through this. Please consult with your physician on this matter for more specific and up-to-date advice.

We hope this helps *insha'a Allah*.

Q. 17

I'm a young mother who was just blessed with a baby boy three months ago. I'm a professional who used to work in the high tech industry before getting married and having my baby. As you know, most of the companies here in North America only allow a maximum of 9 months of maternity leave. This means that for me to be able to keep my good job with my high tech company, I have to put my child in a day care facility after my maternity leave ends. My son will only be 8 months old then. I feel that he would still be too young to be left in a day care or with a baby sitter. I'm afraid that this may have a negative impact on his development. However, I can't imagine myself leaving my very high paying job and staying at home to take care of my child. A you know, in the current job market it is not as easy to find jobs. It is considered suicidal for anyone to leave a good paying job in this market. I'm really puzzled and don't know what to do. Should I put my child in a day care facility or leave him with a baby sitter so I don't lose my job? Or would the damage be too much such that I should stay with him until he is three or four years old, then look for another job at that point in time? Jazakum Allah Khayran for your advice.

Answer

It is encouraging to know that our sister is concerned about the environment that will surround her young son particularly in the early years of his life. The prophet Muhammad *SAAW* warned us about the seriousness of the environment and its detrimental impact on the personality and the future of the young person in his very famous saying: "Each new born is born in a state of pure innate nature. His parents could convert him to be a Jew, or a Christian, or a fire

worshiper"[25] Parents represent the first and closest circle of environment surrounding the child and their impact on him is strong enough to make him change his pure innate nature and convert it to a different undesired way.

Because of the above, we feel that the child should stay with his parents during at least the first three years of his life. These are the most critical years of the child's life and most of his personality traits will be formed during these years. Also, the emotional bond between the child and the caregiver is mainly formed during these years. As such, our advice for the mother would be to stay home with your child and to take good care of him during these very valuable years of his development.

Now, what would the situation be if it were absolutely necessary for the mother to work outside the home and to place her son in a day care facility or to leave him with a babysitter? Here are a few precautionary measures that the parents should ensure:

- Make sure that the child is placed with only one babysitter for the whole period the mother will be away or in one good day care facility. Don't keep changing the babysitter or the daycare facility.
- Make sure that the babysitter or the caregivers at the daycare centre are good people whose ideas and thoughts are clean, proper, and healthy. They will be with your child for most of the day and most of the week. Your child will be highly affected by their way of doing things and his mind will be shaped by their thoughts, and he will be attached to them.
- Make sure that this babysitter is only taking care of a very limited number of children along with your child. No more than 3-4 children is reasonable, so that she will have enough time to give each of them the needed care.

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[25] Agreed Upon

• Don't leave the child with the babysitter or in the daycare for more than four hours daily.
• The child has to spend enough time with his parents everyday after he comes back from the daycare or from the babysitter's place. This means that the parents have to make sure that they secure enough time to spend with their child, interacting with him, and not just fulfilling his physical needs. Parents need to make sure that the time they spend with their child is contributing positively to building this very important bond between them and their child.
• The babysitter or the daycare facility should be using the same language used at home, otherwise the child will be confused and may face some problems developing his language skills.
• Finally, it is absolutely crucial that there will be no activities in that daycare facility or at the babysitter's place that reflect negatively on the child or contradict the belief system of the parents.

Q. 18

I am trying to teach my five and a half year old son about Islam and Allah. I had a hard time answering him when he asked me where Allah is and why he cannot see Allah. I asked him, "Can you see the air you breathe that helps you live?"

Answer

Let us take a moment to commend you on the excellent analogy you gave your child to help him understand that not everything that exists can be seen. When a parent teaches a child about the Creator, the task is made easy because it meets the natural *fitrah* (intuitive sense or pure innate nature) of the child. However, to reinforce this concept, you need to address it repeatedly using many different methods. For example, on a sunny day you could call your son to the sunlight, pat a pillow in the sunlight, and let him see all the little dust particles that appear in the sunbeams. Then you could take that same pillow and go to a shaded area and do the same thing and then ask him where the dust is in this case? Point out that, although the dust is not seen in the shaded area because the sun light is not there, the dust still exists and is still there.

You can also give an analogy for how our minds are not capable of knowing or imagining what Allah *SWT* is like and our eyes are not capable of seeing Allah *SWT*. Use the analogy of a little ant that is standing by the side of your boy's foot, and then ask your son: "Do you think the ant can imagine your whole body or what you can see or feel just by standing beside the side of a little part of your foot? Can the ant imagine that you have a big foot and that there is a leg above your foot? Can the ant imagine the color of

your foot? Can the ant imagine the body above your leg and your head? Can the ant imagine what your eyes and face look like? Can the ant imagine what is going on in your mind right now (like what you did today and your plans for tomorrow and for the future)? The ant is a creature of Allah *SWT* and you are a creature of Allah *SWT*. While both of you are creatures, you are so great and magnificent to the ant to the extent that the ant is not capable of seeing all of you or imagining all of you. If the ant is unable to fully know and understand you when you are both creatures, how are we supposed to fully know and understand Allah *SWT* who is the creator and not the creature? We are not capable of seeing Him or imagining what He looks like. Allah has created our mind and our senses to help us live and deal with our life on earth. He did not create our mind and our senses to be able to see or imagine Him. In the Hereafter insha Allah, Allah will give those who go to paradise senses that are capable of seeing Him. This will be the highest pleasure we can attain as humans. So direct your son's attention to working his way towards paradise so he can enjoy seeing Allah *SWT* there. Try to follow the Prophet's advice *SAAW* when he told us to think about th creation of Allah and not the nature of Allah. So use every opportunit whenever you are eating or out in the park, to remind your son that we are surrounded by the creation of Allah and how magnificent it is.

Q. 19

I often find myself feeling very frustrated when my four year old asks me a lot of questions. The frustration I feel leaves me in bad shape. How should I deal with my situation, considering that she is my only child?

Answer

Questioning by children is a normal way for them to explore their environment and learn about the many things around them. Children are curious and it is through asking questions and hearing their responses that they fulfill their curiosity and learn. Parents should be happy that their children are asking them questions. It is a sign of intelligence and it is an opportunity for the parents to instill the right concepts and the proper Islamic values in the minds and hearts of their children.

It is quite unfortunate that there is a misconception that a child who asks a lot of questions is being impolite. Parents should change their attitudes toward this issue of asking questions. What we have to make sure of is that the child is asking the questions in a polite and respectful way.

If the child asks a question, it means that s/he is ready to learn about the subject he is asking about. Of course the language and the level of knowledge communicated to the child by parents should be suitable for his/her age group. Children may also ask questions because they are bored due to a lack of activity in their lives. Being the only child may contribute to this boredom. For you to solve such a problem, you have to provide the child with certain activities, like going to the park and allowing them to interact with other children more often.

The mother could be frustrated with her child's questions because she may not know the answer to all the questions. In this case, there is nothing wrong with telling the child that you will try to find out the answer to her question. A good way of doing this could be to read a book about the subject your child raises. Another thing that could be frustrating the mother is the timing of the questions. She may be busy doing other tasks when the child asks a question and, in this case, there is nothing wrong with telling the child that you will discuss it later or address the issue later in the day. However, if you can put aside the other task for a while and address the child's question that would be better. In general, parents should change their attitude toward children's questions and be happy that their children are asking questions and trying to acquire the proper knowledge to respond to such questions.

Q. 20

I have been trying to potty train my son, who is 2 years and three months old, for about 4 to 5 months. When we go out daily he wears diapers but at home I take the diaper off even though he does not tell me when he needs to urinate or defecate. When he urinates he does so openly, but when he defecates he always goes and hides in a particular closet and does it there. When he does this, should I force him to defecate in the potty

Answer

Toilet training is an important step in teaching a child responsibility. It should be taken seriously and done properly so it does not leave the child with any negative feelings. Toddlers are physiologically ready to be toilet trained around the age of two. They should not be treated harshly, blamed or be made to feel ashamed throughout the process of toilet training. To start the training, it is advisable that the mother free herself of other responsibilities so she can be home with the child for a period of one to two weeks. During this period of time, her focus should be on the child and not on any housekeeping. She should have a potty ready at home in an area of the house where there is no carpet. Also, she should place some books, toys (like play dough) and coloring pencils in this same area. She should spend this period of time primarily in the area where the potty is located. In the morning, she should take the child's underwear off and let him wear a long T-shirt or dress that reaches his knees. Then invite the toddler to sit on the potty in a nice way, telling him that you know he is a good kid and that he will soon be going on the potty. If the child resists, take a soft toy like a teddy bear, seat it on the potty and playfully display how the bear

is good for going on the potty. Take some water in a cup and pour it in the potty and say that the teddy bear has done it in the potty. Take the teddy bear off the potty and hug and kiss him. Then tell your child that it is his turn to sit on the potty. Make the child sit for about ten minutes, if the child becomes restless and wants to leave, play with him or read a story for him to keep him on the potty. If it happens that the child urinates in the potty, then make a big deal about it by hugging him and encourage him by telling him that he is a big boy and that you're going to tell his dad and brothers/sisters. The encouragement that you give your child should be very exaggerated to keep him going throughout the process of potty training. After giving the child a break for a half hour to one hour, then you should put him back on the potty and repeat the whole process. It would help if you allow your child to drink lots of water and juice during this training period. One common scenario with toddlers during this training period is that they sit on the potty for a long time and then once they get off it, they urinate on the floor somewhere. If this happens, the mother should not get angry; she should just take a cloth, give it to the toddler and tell him to clean up the mess he made. At the same time, sh should take the teddy bear again, hug and kiss him and pour some wate in the potty and say that he is good for doing it in the potty. Continue this process on a consistent basis until the child learns how to regulate himself. Once the child learns how to control his one function (urinating), the other one will follow.

Insha Allah, if you follow this procedure carefully, I think that your son will learn how to control himself. Once he is trained at home in using the potty properly, you should follow this up with taking the diaper off of him when he goes outside and using pull-up underwear and letting him use the toilet frequently when he is outside. The same goes for when he goes to bed.

Q.21

I have a child who is 3.5 years old and a six month old baby. Every time I go shopping at the super market while they are with me I end up shouting, yelling, and sometimes even spanking my 3.5 year old. He embarrasses me and makes the shopping trip a miserable experience for me. He keeps bringing items from the various shelves of the store and putting them in our shopping cart. I tell him not to do that, but he never listens. When I yell at him or spank him, he starts crying very loudly and then I feel very bad and embarrassed because of his crying. Because of this, I usually yield to his wishes and buy some of the stuff he puts in the shopping cart. I don't know what to do with him. Can you please advise me to a clear course of action that I should take to solve this problem? Jazakum Allah Khayran.

Answer

This is a common problem at this age, particularly when parents are not consistent in dealing with the problem and don't provide early training followed by applying the necessary consequences.

Here are some suggestions that we can offer our sister to help in solving this problem:

- Plan your shopping trips to allow for enough time to repeat the trip so that you have the option of cutting the trip short if your child misbehaves in the store. This is important in order to teach him that there are consequences for his actions. You should be doing this regularly until he learns his lesson. As such you have to give yourself enough time for all these trips because you may need to make your shopping trip a few times rather then once to drive the point home that if he misbehaves, you really will leave the store.

• Make sure you are rested and calm before the shopping trip so you won't be easily agitated with your child's behaviour in the store and so you can avoid yelling and shouting in response to his misbehaving. To achieve this (being calm and in control) you may seek the help of your husband or a family member to give you the opportunity to get enough rest. If no family member lives close by, cooperating with a neighbor to mutually help each other with the children could help in this area. Also, enrolling the child in a preschool or a day care for a few hours a day could also be a viable option.

• Talk to your child before going shopping. Let him know that in the store you expect him to behave nicely (not to run, not to remove merchandise from the shelves except with your permission, etc.) Let him know that he has the option of walking next to you in the store or sitting in the shopping cart. Also let him know that if he doesn't follow your instructions and do as you say in the store, you will cut the shopping trip short and take him back home. Promise him that if he behaves properly in the store you will allow him to pick one or two items he likes and buy it for him.

• Suppose your child agrees to walk quietly beside you in the store and so you allow him to pick two items of his choice at the end of the trip as a treat. If he starts picking up other items other than the two he is allowed, don't shout or yell at him to put them back. Rather, take him by the hand to the shelf and ask him gently but firmly to put the items back. If he is reluctant to do so, help him with words of encouragement such as: "You are a nice boy. The nice boy puts back the items on the shelf. Here, mom will help you", and carry the item with him back to the shelf.

• Every time your child behaves properly during the shopping trip, remember to praise him for his good behaviour and occasionally reward him.

• Some stores have designated areas for children to play in. Try to do your shopping in one of these stores and make sure you allow your child to spend sometime in the play area before you start shopping.

- If you have a neighbor who has children around the same age, try to coordinate your shopping trips together. Each of you can prepare her shopping list before going to the store. At the store, one of you could do the shopping for both and the other could supervise the children in the play area.
- Be consistent in applying the above tips and try not to lose control of your temper at all. Never yell or shout at your child, but repeat your instructions to him firmly in an assertive voice but gently at the same time.
- To help keep your child busy or entertained throughout your shopping trip, allow him to help you in collecting certain (unbreakable) items from your shopping list. For example, you can ask him to pick up that bag of bread off the shelf and put it in your cart etc. This will help keep him occupied so he doesn't have a chance to wander around and grab other items that you don't want or need.

Q.22

How can you communicate a message to young children with their short attention span? I feel like they don't focus on any issue or pay much attention to me when I speak with them. I feel it is very difficult to get them to understand what I want from them and make them follow up on what we agree upon. Can you please advise me on this important issue? Any practical suggestions would be highly appreciated. Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer To communicate a message to children, although they have very short attention spans, parents should ensure the following:

- Have a clear set of rules in place and apply them consistently across the board without exception.
- Explain these rules to the children using very simple language that they can understand.
- Repeat the explanation, if needed, more than one time until these rules and their application become part of the children routine.
- Follow up closely on the behaviour you want to change and monitor its progress.
- Evaluate the situation frequently and assess the results of applying these rules on the issue you want to correct.
- Modify your rules, if need be, based on the evaluation and assessment of each problem.

Here are some examples of rules that may help you in getting your message across:

• No TV before homework is complete
– In a very clear and assertive way, parents should explain to their children that they are not allowed to watch TV before they finish their homework
– If at any time your child turns the TV on before finishing his/her homework, remind him/her of the rule and quietly turn the TV off
– If you have more than one child, set an approximate range of time by when they are supposed to have finished their homework by. After this range, even if one of them hasn't finished his/her homework, allow the rest of the children to watch TV while making sure that you are providing a proper quiet environment for the other child to finish his/her homework
• You can only play for five minutes if you work for at least 10 minutes.
– This could be applied for homework and house chores as well. For example, if the child does chores for 10 minutes, then he can take a five minute break for play before continuing.
• Visiting friends takes place only on the weekends and after taking permission from parents
• Etc.

to be consistent in applying the rule and the children will get the sage and it will insha Allah become part of their routine.

:o get your message across that, for example, homework is important, n to your child and remind him/her that if s/he does her/his homework, will get a better job when s/he grows up. Also tell him/her that as a result . completing homework, doing well in school, and getting a better job, s/he will have more money to buy what /she wants and to live comfortably.

Q. 23

I have two children. Ahmed is six and Faheemah is four. In order to teach them to share and not be selfish, we make all the toys common for both of them. They still fight frequently about a toy or a book and once one of them holds a toy the other one wants it.
What can we do?

Answer Fighting between children is normal at this age. They will always find something to fight about. As such, making all the toys common at home won't solve the problem since they will find other reasons to fight. Also, when you make all toys common at home you are not fulfilling one of the human instincts that is recognized by Islam; this is the right of individual ownership. In addition, our kids can't learn to share unless they own something to share. If all the toys and books in the house are common, we are not solving the problem of fighting, rather we are depriving our children from having opportunities to learn very good social skills that are needed for their healthy development.

Parents' duties toward children's fights are to:

- Make sure that these fights don't become rough and lead to bodily harm. Monitor them and never allow them to escalate beyond a certain level, particularly if one of the children is much older, stronger or heavier than the other child. Children's safety should be at the top of the parents' priority list
- Not take sides so that the kids don't feel that you are favoring one of them over the other. The way you interject to solve the problem will have a lot to do with this
- Ensure that fights don't leave a lasting negative effect on your children's relationship that could lead to them hating each other. Your goal is to make sure that your children grow up to love and

care about each other. Again, the way you step in to help in solving the problem can impact how your children feel about each other

- When fights between your children occur, use the occurrence as an opportunity to teach them proper conflict resolution methods

Here are some suggestions for how to solve the problem of fighting between your two children:

- Set very clear rules of ownership. If the toy belongs to one child, he or she has the right to allow or not allow the other child to use it.
- If the toy is common (ie, does not belong to a specific child) make sure that equal sharing is the rule. Set a specific time, 2-5 minutes for example, for each child to use the toy.
- Don't rush to solve the problem for your children. Give them enough time to resolve the situation themselves. If you decide to interfere, don't impose a solution; just guide them towards coming up with the solution themselves.
- Deal with your children equally. Don't favor one child over the other because of age.

Q.24

Is there any particular supplication (Dua'a) that we can make for our children? Please refer to the Qur'an.

Answer If the reader means supplications to protect our children and hope that they will grow up to be good Muslims, the Qur'an certainly includes such supplications, as follows:

- "O Allah, grant us from our spouses and our off spring that which would sooth our eyes and make us leaders for those who observe their duties toward Allah"[26]
- "O Allah make us and our off spring submit fully to you and show us our rituals and accept our repentance"[27]

Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* indicated to us specific supplications said when we congratulate a person who is blessed with a n He instructed us to say; "May Allah bless your new born whom I to you, and may you thank Allah, and may the new born reach maturity, and may you be blessed with the best of him"[28]

[26] (Q 25, V74)
[27] (Q 2, V 128)
[28] Al Azkar Al Nawaweyah, ed. 2.06

Pre Teens

Q.25

My son is 9 years old. He is a good kid. He obeys us as parents, loves Islam, and is proud to be Muslim. He often asks me about what he should and shouldn't do? Alhamdulellah, I spend enough time with him explaining what is wrong, and what is right. He loves to talk to his non-Muslim neighbors and schoolmates about Islam. However, it looks like he is always telling them that "You are wrong and I'm right. You will go to Hellfire and I'll go to Paradise." I came to know about this because one of my neighbors told me what he told her son. I'm disturbed and I don't know what to do. I love that he is a devoted Muslim, but I don't want him to speak to the neighbors' kids or to his classmates in this manner which may turn them away from him. Please advise me on what to do?

Answer The attitude referred to in this question is not uncommon among a certain percentage of our young children living here in North America. It is an indication that these kids are proud of their identity as Muslims, but at the same time, that they lack the understanding of certain Islamic concepts related to the proper manners of dealing with others, as well as basic Islamic concepts associated with being a true Muslim. It is the parent's duty to make sure that they teach their children these important concepts and manners. Here are some points parents should emphasize with their children to avoid such a problem:

- Remind your child of the concept of having the proper motive (intention?) for any action (*Neyah*). As was emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* in many of his teachings, it is an absolute must that we have the proper intention for any of our actions to be accepted by Allah *SWT*. Our intention should always be to please Allah *SWT* and not to brag about our achievements or lifestyle. Speaking to others in the way indicated in the

question may risk the acceptance of our good deeds by Allah *SWT*.

• Review your actions at home and find out if you are doing or saying anything that could lead your children to behave in this manner with non-Muslims. For example, ask yourself how you refer to your neighbors when your child asks you to do something that they are doing and he is not allowed to do. Do you say, "We don't do this because we are Muslims but they are *Kuffar* so they can do this?" If this, or something similar, is what you say to your child, then he/she could develop an attitude of looking down on non-Muslims that you described in your question. It is crucial that parents observe what they do and say about the main stream society we are living in. It is recommended by the Qur'an and by the Prophet's teachings that we be kind to non-Muslims and do good to them.[29]

• Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* instructed us to be very good to ou neighbors. Mention some of his sayings to your child and discu with your child how you can put the advice from these saying into practice. One of his important sayings in this area is, "Arc Angle Jabril continued to advise me regarding neighbors to the extent that I thought he would ask me to include my neighbors in my inheritance."[30]

• Remind your child that arrogance and boasting are two very bad qualities that are not liked by Allah *SWT*. The main fault of *Shaytan* was, and still is, arrogance. He was cursed and deprived from *Jannah* because of his negative sense of pride and because of viewing himself as superior to others.

• Remind your child that we are not responsible for judging people. Muslims should leave this matter to Allah *SWT*. You can use verse number 17 in Surah number 22 to support your argument.

• Talk with your child about the importance of being nice to our non-Muslim friends as a way of inviting them to the beautiful way of life, Islam. Let him know that when we conduct ourselves in a bad

[29] (Q 60, V 8)
[30] Ibn Muagah

manner, accuse others, and put them down, they wouldn't like to be in our company. However, when we conduct ourselves in a good manner with others, it leaves a positive impression on them and they will be happy to see us again and to speak with us and spend time with us. This will give us more opportunities to discuss the principles of our way of life with them and will leave the door open for more dialogue in this area. Remind him of the advice of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* that we have to observe our duties towards Allah *SWT* wherever we are, that we have to follow a bad deed with a good one so it may wipe it out, and that we have to deal with others in a good manner.[31] Also remind your child that the reward of guiding some one to Islam is so immense that the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said, "If Allah were to guide only one person to the Right Path through your efforts, it is better for you than the whole world."[32]

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[31] At Termezy
[32] Agreed Upon

Q.26

We have three children: 11, 9, and 7 year old boys. We have a problem with our 9 year old boy. He feels that we are favoring his siblings (older and younger) over him. We feel we are fair to all of them and we don't know why he feels this way. I don't think that we are doing anything to make him feel this way. I keep telling him that we are not favoring his brothers over him, that it is just something in his mind, and that it is not fair that he says this about his parents. I tell him he should forget about these feelings he has because they are not real and that he should be like his brothers who don't say that we are favoring others over them.

Is this a common problem for the middle child of the family? Are we handling it the right way? If not, what should be done?

JAzakum Allah Khayran

Answer

More often than not, this type of problem may oc for middle children. The way you are handling situation is not helping your child feel that you are treating all of th equally. From your question, it appears that you are mainly concer with proving that you are not guilty of favoritism, and not as mu concerned with getting to the bottom of the problem and finding out w your son feels this way. If he perceives that you are favoring his broth over him, this means that most probably you are favoring his broth (even just a little) over him. You should be more concerned with h feelings than with proving him wrong and rejecting his complaint. Here is what we suggest you do:

- Firstly, don't quickly dismiss your son's complaints and act like nothing is wrong. Avoid mentally denying this issue.
- Assure your son that you love him as much as you love his

other siblings. You can give him a big hug and a kiss whenever he is sitting close to you and say: "I really love you very much."

• Talk to your son and try to find out why he is having these feelings. Ask him clearly to tell you what makes him feel that you are favoring his siblings over him.

• Be a good listener and don't disregard any claim he has. Consider everything he says.

• Some of his claims could just be misperceptions by your son because of certain observations he has made. It is your duty as a parent to make sure that the child's conclusions based on certain observations are correct and proper.

• Take the findings of your discussion with your son seriously and have a plan to work on them to make sure you get the required results.

• Meanwhile, check your behaviour toward him and his siblings and see where you can improve. The process of self search and self improvement explained in detail in the first section of this book could provide you with the practical steps to help improve your parenting behaviour toward this child.

Q.27

There is this kid who is always picking on my son. He calls him names and hits him almost every time he sees him. He is 8 while my son is 7 years old, but both are 2nd graders in different schools now. They used to be together in the same school for 2 years and I always heard my son complaining that "X called me stupid", "X hit me", etc. The problem is that the kid's father is someone I know, but I always feel that he doesn't tell his son to stop.

I've always told my son to be nice, and have good Islamic manners. I also tell my son to tell the boy's dad when the boy hits him, but I am almost ready to tell my son to do it the "old fashioned" way. (ie: if he hits you, hit him back, if he says you are stupid, say it back to him, etc.) The last ordeal happened yesterday. I tried to talk to the boy's dad, but he said that his son did nothing wrong, so I said I would start asking my son to deal with his son the old fashioned!

Sometimes, I think avoidance would be the best strategy and that I she just keep them away from each other and minimize our interac with this family for now, but I think this is wrong and I also thi "old fashioned" way is wrong. So, what do you recommend? I am st have been asked this question a lot in the past.

Jazakoum Allah Kheir for your advice.

Answer Here are some points for your consideration:

• Unfortunately, you are correct that this is a common problem that most young boys will face at one stage or another while growing up. As such, avoidance is not a good idea. You may avoid contact with this specific

boy or family, but another boy could start doing this. You have to face the problem and try to find a solution for it. Avoidance doesn't provide you with the opportunity to train your son how to face problems while he is still under your supervision. He needs the training because it is not a perfect world out there and he may face similar problems again where the experience he gained from his training will prove to be of great help to him insha'a Allah.

• It is normal for boys around your son's age to fight for their position within the group. Usually, they try to establish some sort of ranking system within the group and everyone tries to find a place for himself within this ranking system. The group wants to clearly know the position of every one within this system. A person who is high in the ranks is popular and has more friends, while a person who is low is an easy target for abuse and is readily ridiculed. It is not easy for a young boy to be the target of such abuse and it could have a negative impact on his self- esteem.

• It is good that you are telling your boy to be nice and behave with good manners. There is no doubt that as parents we need to instill this in our children's personalities. However, this shouldn't be a reason for them to be bullied and ridiculed. We can teach our sons not to start a fight and not to be aggressive and hit other boys, but at the same time, we have to rain them to defend themselves and teach them a good strategy to deal with such situations whenever they occur. You can teach your son to do the following when another child hits or pushes him:

– Train your son to say loudly in an angry voice: "Don't hit me. That hurts!"

– Let him repeat this quickly three or four times with the same angry tone of voice and as loud as he can without shouting.

– If the other person doesn't stop right away, your son should start pushing him back away from him and even hit him back if he can.

– If it happens again, your son should push the other kid away while he is angrily saying: "Don't hit me. It hurts."

– At home, the father or the mother should try to train the child on how to hit back by occasionally playing rough with him during the children's play time at your home.

– When this happen in the school, out of respect for the school system, your child should first try to solve the problem by taking it to an adult in the school such as a teacher or a social worker if they are available. Only if the adult fails to take action then the child should start hitting back. Because at schools, they usually don't consider who started the fight, but punish both people who participated in it as long as there was an adult present on duty that the child could have gone to for help.

• We realize that this may be difficult for your son to do particularly if he was not trained to do this from a young age. However, it is important for him to start doing this now and not to wait anymore.

• Some kids may learn how to stand up for themselves faster than others. It may take a few trials for your son since he was not trained to do this from an early age. Don't get discouraged if you don't get immediate results. Encourage your son to continue dealing with the aggressor in this way and you will see results *insha'a Allah*.

• Monitor the progress and assess the situation frequently. Continuousl encourage your son to stand up for his rights. If you feel that this is affec ing his self-esteem negatively, try to create situations during the trainin period to shelter him from feeling incapable of defending himself.

• Don't sever your ties with the other family. Stay on OK terms w them.

• Make lots of *Du'a* to Allah *SWT* and pray "*Salatul Hajjah*" occasionall asking Allah to help your son get over this problem and guide the children of all Muslims to do the right thing.

We hope this helps insha'a Allah.

Q.28

I have four children, a 9 year old boy, a 6 year old girl, a 3 year old girl, and a one year old boy. I have a problem with my 9 year old son. He often gets angry and upset and deals with me in a disrespectful way. He is doing OK with his regular schoolwork but he protests whenever I ask him to do his Arabic homework or memorize the Qur'an. He wants to play all the time, and he frequently asks me to buy him new clothes, games, and toys. Whenever I try to explain to him the reasons why we are not going to buy these things, he protests, becomes rude, and keeps demanding that we buy these things. I really don't know how to deal with him and I need some advice so our relationship doesn't get ruined.

Answer

At the age of 9 years old, the child becomes observant of what other kids at his age do and have. Often, they want to imitate their classmates in an attempt to feel that they belong to the school environment. As such, the child may often come home and ask his parents to buy him different things like a brand name jacket, shoes, or a particular game. Whenever the parents don't agree, that poses a problem for the child who doesn't know how to belong except through what he wears and has.

Dealing with such a situation needs to be done in a rather comprehensive way as a simple 'NO' may not work. Parents need to put themselves in the child's shoes and let him know that they know how it feels for him to be surrounded by kids whose focus in life is mainly to buy fashionable clothes and the latest entertainment gadgets. Parents should use such opportunities to educate the child about the Islamic understanding of wealth, money, and spending in general. They should explain to him that

it is a responsibility that every Muslim should take seriously as Allah *SWT* will ask them about how they earned their money/wealth and how they spent it. The use of the following saying of the Prophet *SAAW* will help parents illustrate their point in a very clear, beautiful and firm way:

"Every servant of Allah will be asked on the Day of Judgment about four things: how he used his life, how he used his youth years, how he earned his money and spent it, and how he used his knowledge."[33]

Parents should explain this Hadeeth to their child and describe the events of the Day of Judgment and how everybody will be anxious and terrified in the highest court of justice in front of Allah until the process is over and their case is settled. Parents should make sure that the child gets the message that this is a horrific day and it is not a joke or to be taken lightly. We should all be prepared for this day by doing the right things in every aspect of our lives.

[33] At Termezy, and At Tabarany

Q.29

My daughter is 7 years old. Her mind is always occupied with popular toy figures such as Barbie and the like. She asks me to buy these collections of toys for her and she compares the way she looks with the way these toys look. She complains about her hair being frizzy rather than straight and about her skin being dark rather than fair. I always tell her that she should be thankful for what she has and stop asking for these things. But she continues to ask me and complain about her features. Any advice on how to deal with this matter?

Answer Here are some important points for you to consider and make use of that can, insha Allah, help your child to have confidence in herself and develop a strong personality:

- Train the child from a very young age to say the *du'aa* "Praise be to Allah *SWT* who fashioned me and gave me my beautiful look"[34] so that she learns that she is blessed with her looks.
- Train the child to also say the *du'aa*: "O`Allah, as you have perfected my looks, please perfect my manners."[35] This saying of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* reminds us as parents of the importance of instilling the vital concept that the character of a person matters more than how they look.
- Teach your child the very wonderful saying of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, "Allah doesn't look at your figure but he looks at your hearts and deeds"[36]
- Explain to your child the gimmicks behind the toy and advertisement industry, clarifying to her that they are only after

[34] Al Azkar Al-Nawaweiah
[35] Ahmad
[36] Muslim

making money and that they are not into promoting goodness or being fair to all people. We should be smart and not get deceived and fall into their trap. If we do, we are just wasting our resources (money) and letting those controlling these industries suck our wealth from us.

• Allow the child to own a few of these popular toys so she doesn't feel deprived and is more receptive to your explanation.

• You can be innovative in trying to direct the child's attention to other toys and games that will be fulfilling to her and at the same time divert her attention away from the advertised toy industry. For example, you can make simple toys with her with the help of public library books that give instructions on how to make a bed for Barbie out of a fruit box, or how to knit, etc.

• Minimize the time your child spends in front of the TV. Make TV watching on special occasions such as family get together and try your best to make them watch only useful material in your presence and under your supervision. This will give you the opportunity to explain to them on the spot whenever there is a issue to be clarified.

• Try to rent educational DVDs and videotapes to replace T watching. You will have better control of the content of a program with videotapes and DVDs compared to TV. In addition, this way you can avoid commercials bombarding your children with each and every TV program they watch.

Teenagers

Q.30

I'm a very active mother who tries to attend Islamic annual conventions and regional conferences regularly. I noticed that alhamdulellah, the organizers and program committees of most of these gatherings try their best to have programs accommodating our teens and youth. This is a very good trend. However, this only happens a few times a year during these gatherings. The rest of the year, most of our Muslim teens and youth are not spending their time wisely in their communities. A great number of them spend their time playing video games, surfing the net, chatting in chat rooms, and watching TV. I feel it is very important to get our teens and youth involved in community activities and projects. What do you think about this? Can you please advise parents as to the importance of teen activism and what lessons it instills in the person? Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer We really appreciate this question very much and thank our sister for raising this issue and giving us an opportunity to talk about this very important subject.

Being active and involved for the greater good and well-being of our societies in particular and humanity in general is a very good quality that is highly recognized by Islam. As such, the teachings of Islam promote an active and healthy life style. Here are some of the Qur'anic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to this matter:

- It was reported that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said; "The best of people is the one who benefits others most"[37]
- It was also reported by Ibn Omar *RAA* that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said: "A person who mixes with people and is patient with the

[37] Al Jame' Al-Sagheer

harm that touches him due to this mixing, is better than a person who doesn't mix with people and doesn't exercise patience with them."[38]

• Another beautiful saying of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to this issue is: "The reward by Allah of a person who brings happiness to a household through his/her contribution is none but Paradise"[39]

• We conclude the sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* with this beautiful one: "If The Hour (indication to the beginning of the Day of Judgment) was to start and one of you is holding a small palm tree in his hand and he could plant it, let him/her go ahead and plant it"[40]

Because of all of the above advice, we always recommend in our parenting and teen's workshops that parents should strive hard to provide their childre with the opportunity to live an active life style at home, within the comm nity, and within the main stream society. Providing our children with active and healthy life style and getting them involved in fruitful projects a activities is no doubt a great thing to do and we will be rewarded immen ly for it because of the following:

• It is a direct act of obedience to Allah's orders and His messeng teachings
• It has a very healthy and positive impact in developing rounded, strong personality in our children. It also has a gre on our children's self esteem.
• It occupies our children's time and saves them from directin energy toward trivial activities that could negatively affect personalities
• It contributes positively to the wellbeing of our Muslim communities in particular and the North American society in general

As such, teen activism is an important tool in helping raise strong, confident Muslim teens who feel a sense of worth in being contributing members of the community and society. Cooperation between Muslim families, community leaders of Mosques, Islamic centers, and main stream officials

[38] Al Bukhary, Atermezy, and Ibn Majah
[39] At Tabarany
[40] Ahmad

is a must for the success of activism programs for our teens. There are many success stories of teen activism among various Muslim communities all over North America. These success stories should be shared with other communities. A logical platform for this would be the specialized sessions of the Islamic annual conventions.

Here are some of the areas in which we can get our youth involved and active:

- Organizing major community events such as Eid celebrations/ festivals and open houses, etc.
- Organizing sports competitions among Muslims living in the same city or intercity competitions in regions where cities are close by.
- Tapping into main stream projects to help our Muslim teens participate in events such as the following:
  - Planting trees
  - Cleaning parks
  - Supervising young children during trips
  - Helping in Hospitals and senior citizen home, etc.

Q.31

My son, who is 15 years old, wants to join his school's football team. I feel that having our children involved in sports activities is a positive and healthy thing. However, I'm concerned that the culture of the school football team may include certain practices that are not proper (that go against our Islamic values and principles). Should I allow my son to join his school football team or not?

Answer

There are a few points to address in answering this question. They are the following:

- The culture of sports teams in schools differs immensely depending on the level of schooling. Sports team culture in elementary and middle school will vary greatly from that of high schools. As such, it is important to consider the age of the child and what kind of school he goes to. In the absence of such information, we find ourselves obliged to provide certain guidelines as an answer and hope that the reader will pick what is right for her/his situation.

- In general, there is nothing wrong with our children getti involved and participating in various activities in their school long as these activities don't include anything that is Islamic unacceptable.

- In such situations, parents should use every opportunity to trai the child in certain skills. For example, in this situation, the parents can train the child in the proper decision making process. This is a real situation and they should use the opportunity to teach him how to collect all the information that will help him make the right decision, how to analyze this information to come up with alternatives, and how to assess the pros and cons of each alternative, etc.

- Suppose after the issue is researched, it was found that there are certain activities of the football team that don't contradict our Islamic values, while others are not acceptable to us from an Islamic point of view. Parents should discuss with the child to come up with a way for the son to participate in the acceptable activities of the team while avoiding the unacceptable ones.
- It is of utmost importance that the son is an active part of all these discussions and that no decision is made by the parents alone. Including the son in the discussions will make him feel that his parents value his input in the matter and will help ensure that he will accept the end decision and try to stick to it, even if it is a bit difficult.

Q. 32

My son is 17 years old. Whenever I advise him about something, he says: "I'm an adult, I'm free to do what I want." What should I do in this situation?

Answer Most scholars and psychologists define the age of your son as falling near the end of the middle adolescent stage. Two of the main characteristics of this stage are:

1. The teen is actively seeking and looking for independence
2. The teen doesn't like to be ordered around or instructed directly with regards to what he should or should not do

Because of this, sometimes teens in this stage resort to rebelling against their parents' orders in order to prove their independence. This occurs more when parents neglect to build a strong bond and good relationship with their children by not investing wisely in the early years of their childhood. Also, although at 17 years old teens are not as sensitive as in the early adolescent stages, they still don't feel comfortable when their parents order them to do specific things. This is particularly so when these orders are related to the way they look, the way they dress and the way they do things in general. These orders or words of advice are also not appreciated if they are given in front of other siblings or friends.

If it's any consolation, rest assured that your teen's behaviour is perfectly normal and you shouldn't be alarmed by such behaviour. As long as he respects you and speaks with you politely regarding his desire to make his own decision because he is an adult now, you should be happy that he is maturing and wants to be a responsible adult. Don't forget that at this age, Osamah Ibn Zaid *RAA*, was assigned the leadership of the Prophet's army.

Also a great number of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* were around this age.

We also think you can maintain a healthier relationship with your teen if you don't directly order him to do certain things. Try to formulate what you want him to do in the form of a suggestion to him. For example, rather than telling him, "Why don't you do such and such?" you could say, "How about doing such and such?", or "What do you think about doing such and such?"

Q. 33

My daughter is 14 years old and my son is 12 years old. Alhamdulellah they are doing OK academically. I try to keep them at home away from any risk of danger. I don't allow them to be part of any extra curricular activities for fear of the culture and what they could learn from these activities. They are always complaining that they are bored and they are not very welcoming of the idea of just always memorizing Qur'an as a way to fill their time. They are always asking to watch TV and sit long hours in front of the computer. They occasionally ask me to go to the movies with their classmates. Whenever I object to this, they say there is nothing else for them to do. I should also mention that they don't have friends because I'm afraid of the negative influence their friends might have on them. Am I doing the right thing? Should I allow them to have friends knowing that for sure they will have a negative effect on m children's personality? Should I allow them to go to the movies wit their classmates? Please help me. I'm really confused and don't kno what to do.

Answer

This question covers many important and sensitiv areas in the lives of our children We will try t address our sister's concern in as much detail as we can insha'a Allah. Le us go over them one by one:

- Am I doing the right thing? You are partially doing the right thing with your children with respect to certain areas of their development. However, you are neglecting other important areas. There is no doubt that you are trying to protect them from the harmful effects and risks associated with popular teen culture in North America. You are also trying to get them to memorize Qur'an and they are doing well academically alhamdulellah. These are all good things you are trying to do and we all agree on

that. However, what is important is the approach we use to achieve these goals. Neither is isolating our children from the environment around them the proper approach, nor is allowing them to assimilate fully correct either. The methodology we should adopt is to teach and train them to make the right decision in each situation they face so that they can integrate intelligently (by benefiting from the right practices in society and avoiding the harmful ones). It was said that good practices are the goal of a believer, wherever s/he finds them, s/he is the most deserving of using them.[41] We need our children to be strong and capable of making the correct choices when they are faced with any situation even in our absence. Isolating your children from the society they are living in and always keeping them at home without allowing them to have any friends will neither train them to be strong nor capable of making the correct decisions.

• Should I allow them to have friends knowing that for sure they will have a negative effect on my children's personality? Humans are social beings. Having friends is a natural need for every one and more so particularly for children. Ask yourself how many friends you had when you were your children's age. Were you sad when you moved from one house or one school to another because you would miss your friends? How eager were you to meet new friends in your new neighborhood or in your new school? Parents should acknowledge their children's need for friends. Not only that, but they should also teach them how to select friends because of their tremendous impact on their personalities. They should make use of the wonderful Prophetic advices in this area.[42] Here are two of these sayings:

> "On the authority of *Abu Huraira RAA* who reported that he heard the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* saying: A man follows his friends religion, so each one should consider whom he makes his friend."[43]

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[41] Ibn Majjah

[42] See Chapter 1-45 of "Riadul Salehhen" titled "Visiting the Pious and Sitting with Them as well as Adopting Their Company" for various teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to this subject

[43] At Termizy and Abu Dawood

> "On the authority of Abu Mussa Al-Ash'ari *RAA* that he heard the Messenger of Allah *SAAW* saying: The similitude of good company and that of bad company is that of the owner of musk and of the one (iron-smith) blowing bellows. The owner of musk would either offer it to you free of charge, or you would buy it from him, or you would smell its pleasant odor. As for the iron-smith, he would either burn your clothes or you shall have to smell its repugnant smell"[44]

Parents should also help their children in finding good friends who will have a positive impact on their personalities. It is crucial that you monitor any changes in your child's behaviour as a result of a friendship, evaluate the situation frequently, and provide any necessary adjustments such as decreasing or increasing the time your child spends with this friend depending on the effect he/she is having on your child.

• Should I allow them to go to the movies with their classmates? The answer to this question will depend on what type of movie s/he wants to see. The answer will sometimes be no, and at other times it may be yes. The most important thing when children ask us a question like this is to train them to consider the proper criteria based on which we can see the movie or not. As such, you should ask him/her to find out about the movie, the plot, any unacceptable scenes, violence, the language used in the movie, etc. before saying yes or no. You should ask him/her to research the above aspects of the movie which is really easy to do through the internet these days and report back to you. Based on the findings, you will decide to allow him/her to go or not to go. If you decide not to allow him/her to go for a specific reason, such as some objectionable scenes in the movie or the use of vulgar language, make sure you explain to him/her, in language they understand, why your answer is no. It is better yet to walk him/her through the logic and your chain of thoughts so s/he could make such decisions on his/her own. Also, make sure that

[44] Agreed Upon

you don't continuously refuse to allow them to go to the movies or suggest alternative activities if the movie is not appropriate. Don't be very strict in your measuring criteria. Allow them to go occasionally but make sure that when they come back you discuss the movie with them and correct any misconceptions they may have because of watching the movie.

To help wean your son and daughter off wanting to go to the movies regularly, you should strive to instill and ingrain certain Islamic concepts in their souls and minds. They should understand that they were created for a purpose and that this life is not just for us to do whatever we want. Every thing we do in this life should contribute positively to fulfilling the ultimate goal of our creation: to worship Allah *SWT* and please Him. We refer the reader to the answer of the first question in this book to help her in this endeavor.

We also recommend that you work hard with your children to make sure that they understand that wealth and time are blessings from Allah *SWT* and that we will be asked about how we used them in this life.[45] Use the numerous sayings given in this reference to help you with this task.

[45] Check the book of Dr. Yousef Al Qaradawi, *Time in the life of a Muslim* for a variety of Qur'anic verses, Prophetic teachings and sayings of the companions of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* related to the concept of time in a Muslim's life.

Miscellaneous

Q. 34

(a) I was raised up in the old country, where my father or my mother would tell me: do this and I would do it right away without questioning. My parents never discussed with me the wisdom or the reason behind any of their orders. Also I never expected them to offer any reasoning. Children never dared to ask parents: why or protested and said: I wouldn't do it? After reading some of your books and learning some positive parenting skills I understand that you are advocating dialoging, reasoning and discussing everything with our children especially teens. However, when I try to apply these techniques, I found out that I easily get worked out and upset when my children ask me to give reasons or argue with me regarding my orders.

How can I get myself to accept the idea that my children have the right to ask and that I should listen to their point of view without getting angry and suspend my judgment during the discussion? How can I control my anger to be able to use these positive parenting skills techniques effectively?

(34-b) I get angry very easily when my children do something wrong. I shout, yell, and order them around. This behaviour always ends up with more conflicts between me and my children. It is also creating a big gap between us. Can you please advice me what to do?

Answer

JAK for your question. It is encouraging to note that you realized the bad effects of getting angry very easily on your relation with your children. This is a positive step and could be considered the first phase in solving your anger problem.

To help you with this it is important to remember that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* advised us in many of his teachings not to get angry and to try our best to control our anger.[40] Not only he did this, but he *SAAW* also taught us many

[40] See chapter 28 of our book, *Parenting Skills Based on The Qur'an and Sunnah* by amana Publications for details of the saying of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* on this issue.

anger management techniques that we should be using to manage and control our angers such as the following:

- Change your body position
- Make Wudu'
- Say " I seek refuge from Shaytan
- Keep silent "

It is our duty as Muslims and for the sake of our well being and the well being of our children that we train ourselves to control our anger using some of the above anger management techniques. Not only this, but we also should train our children to do the same.

We also refer the reader to the answer of question seven in the first section of this book to benefit from the self search process explained in details to help him managing his anger problem.

[47] See the same reference above for more details on the subject

Q. 35

I have three boys of 11, 9, and 7 years old. My husband is very kind. He loves and cares for our family. He works very hard to make sure that we have everything we need and live at a very comfortable level economically. Alhamdulellah because of his hard work, we have everything we need. Our house is very spacious and well furnished with everything we need. We have more than one computer and the most recent technology in entertainment systems (More than one flat screen TV, DVD players, etc.) We also have a huge swimming pool and more than one car of the latest model loaded with all kinds of features. To maintain this standard of living, my husband has to work very long hours. When he gets back home, the children are usually asleep, and on the rare occasion that he gets home while they are awake, he is too tired to spend time with them. He is also busy during the weekends and seldom has he taken time off from his busy schedule. Even during vacation he has his cell phone with him and often follows up on business. I feel that the boys need to spend time with him at this stage of their lives because, though I can do so much with them, I can't fill the position of their father. I'm afraid that a huge gap is being created between them and their father. I'm scared of the consequences of this. My question is, how much time should a father spend with his children and how can we rectify this situation?

Answer

This is a very serious situation and the concern of our sister is valid and genuine. It is quite unfortunate that a great number of Muslim fathers living in North America are in the same situation in terms of not being part of their children's lives, even if they are not very busy with their businesses, as in the case we are discussing.

From the Islamic point of view, and based on evidence from the Qur'an and Sunnah, parenting is a shared responsibility between both parents.

They have to work together to ensure the best family atmosphere for the healthy and positive development of their children. Failing to do so will result in very serious consequences.

There is nothing wrong with working hard to provide a good and dignified standard of living for our families. However, we should always strive to achieve balance in our lives. Humans need spiritual, mental, and emotional development as much as they need physical development. Having spacious houses filled with all sorts of material objects will not and can not help the spiritual and emotional development of our children. Only a good, loving family atmosphere and a strong bond between parents and children, filled with genuine guidance characterized by wisdom, can help in this area of our children's development.

In a Monitoring the Future Study conducted by Michigan University in 1998, it was found that the average time a father spends with his children is three minutes a day. By all measures, this is a disaster and could easily explain the serious situation of teenagers in North America.

The children in this case are all in the preteen stage, where they are looking for the approval of their peers and trying to fit in with the culture around them. They need the presence of their father in their lives. The mother can't fulfill all their needs. The father has to be closely involved with them and share their aspirations and ambitious. He has to spend time gently coaching and guiding them, helping them navigate the dangerous maze of popular teen culture in North America. To succeed in this job, the father has to establish a very strong bond between himself and his children. This can't be achieved without spending time with them.

One more very important piece of advice to this family to help resolve the situation: please sit down together to discuss and seriously re-evaluate your priorities in life. Make sure to put your children on the top of your priority list. The father should reduce his working hours to free himself up for the more important matter of getting involved with his children. The mother should help in cooperating with the father by planning family time in a way that helps reduce pressure on the father.

Another idea for this family to consider is to engage their children in activities conducted by Muslim Youth Centers in their city if they are available. If not, consider sending them to Muslim Youth Camps during school breaks, and summer holidays. These types of activities provide a wonderful environment for their spiritual, mental, social, and physical development.

Q.36

We have two children who are 4 and 6 years old. My wife and myself love being a part of the community. We help in the Mosque, and attend all the activities in our Islamic center. However, every time we go to the center to participate in certain activities, our boys make lots of noise during the Salat. This makes other worshippers in the Mosque very upset because they can't concentrate in their Salat. The other day, one of the brothers shouted and yelled at my kids after the Salat because of the noise they made. I was embarrassed and felt very bad about it. My question consists of two parts.

First, how can we keep our children quiet during Salat?

Second, does this brother have the right to shout and yell at our children like this? I'm afraid that this incident may make them hate coming to the center. Please advise,

Answer Thank you very much for your question brother. This is certainly a common problem in many communities and we really need to pay attention to it. We don't want to drive young Muslim children away from Mosques and Islamic Centers, but at the same time we would like to keep prayer halls quiet for others to enjoy the time they spend in them and properly perform their Salat in a peaceful atmosphere. In our view, the solution to this problem requires that parents and community officials work together. Parents will mainly work on training their children in the proper behaviour while they are outside the home in various gatherings, particularly in the prayer halls of Mosques and Islamic centers. Community officials have to put a system in place for how to deal with kids running around and making noise in the prayer halls, and make this system known to each and every community member. Here are some suggestions for both areas:

• To train their children to behave properly, parents should:

– Talk to your children before going to the mosque and explain to them that you are going to the Mosque where other people will be. Explain what the Mosque is and why we go there, emphasizing the importance of being very quiet during prayer. Indicate to them that Allah *SWT* will love them and reward them when they don't cause disturbance during *Salat*. Also tell them that if they stay quiet during Salat you too will reward them with something they like.

– While they are in the Mosque and between prayer times, allow them to play in the common area. When the call for prayer is made, take them aside and explain to them again that they have to be very quite during prayer. If the Mosque has a designated room for children/baby sitting, take them to this room. It may be a good idea for parents who have children coming to the mosque, to rotate in supervising the children during prayer. If the mosque is not equipped with a baby sitting room, make sure you bring a coloring book with you for your children or a toy that they can play with quietly during Salat. This will help keep them busy and minimize their disturbance. Make sure they are next to you during Salat, engaged in their activity.

– After coming back from the Mosque, thank your children for being quiet during the Salat in the Mosque and praise them for their good behaviour. You may also like to reward them with something they like.

– Do the above consistently every time you go to the mosque. It may take sometime for them to get use to the routine.

• For the Mosque officials, here are some suggestions:

– Develop a clear written policy explaining various steps to deal with the issue of noise in the Center in general and prayer halls in particular

– Communicate this policy to community members via news- letters, e-mails, regular announcements during community gathering and meetings. Post a few copies of the policy terms in obvious places around the Center

– Assign a few community members to take care of ensuring that the policy is being followed and enforced. It is recommended that those members wear a special uniform or at least have a clear badge indicating that they are responsible for order in the Center.

– Request other community members, when they see any violation of the order policy, to refer it to the Policy Enforcement Volunteers. Only PEV should deal with issues related to keeping order and minimizing noise in the center. Other community members should try their best not to take the issue into their hands to avoid driving people away from the Mosque and to reduce the possibility of friction among community members.

Q.37

My daughter is 9 years old. Unfortunately, my husband is not of the religious kind so since she was born he used to sit with her on his lap and watch all kinds of TV shows and movies (including scenes of adults getting intimate with each other). He did this with her until she was about 6 or so, then he stopped watching certain things in front of her but continued to watch others no matter how much I protested. That is the only time he would spend with her. Recently at Sunday school she was told about ALL the conditions of Ghusl, they are all written in the Children's book of Salah. Since no explanations were given in the book, and being the curious child she is, she went and looked up the meanings of all the words she did not understand and I don't know what she understood from it. Now she can't stop thinking about it. She is always imagining people without clothes kissing and all that. She is very distressed about it. We have completely stopped watching TV even though it means we have to eat dinner in the bedroom because her Dad still watches TV over dinner. We are praying a lot more, saying AsthugfurAllah and Aaudubillah, reading, and listening to the stories of the Prophets but she doesn't seem to get any relief. It is like she is getting those thoughts every minute. She is telling me all the thoughts she gets. I am praying to Allah Subhanatalla as much as I can. Recently she has started to say that she is a bad person. I do not know how to help her with this. Please help me to help her. She is also thinking about liking boys. She says she knows it is Haram but she can't help her thoughts. PLEASE help this desperate mother.

Jazak Allah Khair

Answer The following are a few suggestions for what we think you could do to help improve this situation. However, you have to realize that your daughter was exposed to these influences for a very long time and at a very sensitive age. To overcome

this, you need to be consistent in applying these suggestions, be patient, and don't expect a quick fix solution.

• Explain to your daughter that no person is born bad and that Allah *SWT* created everybody good with a choice to be good or bad in the future. What makes people good or bad are their actions. She hasn't done anything to make her a bad person.Explain to her that as for the images she saw on TV, yes they are bad images and no body should watch them. But at that time she was a young child and as long as she doesn't watch such images now because she realizes it is wrong, she can make repentance (*tawbah*) and Allah *SWT* will insha'a Allah forgive her because Allah *SWT* tells us in the Qur'an that he accepts the repentance from His servants and forgives sins. One exercise that may be very helpful to do is to go over the verses in the Qur'an that talk about *Tawbah* and forgiveness and study them with her. The book of Riadu Al-Saleheen has a complete chapter on Repentance and forgiveness and could be very handy for this exercise. The focus during this exercise is to assure her that repentance is the way to erase mistakes but that there are conditions to be fulfilled for the acceptance of repentance, such as:

– To feel bad about what happened, which she does
– To make a commitment not to repeat the bad action again
– To commit to do extra acts of obedience

In addition to saying *asteghfer* Allah, it is very important that you provide opportunities for your daughter to do good deeds such as giving charity, helping others, visiting a sick person, etc. Make sure that the child does these good actions by herself. For example if she is going to donate to a charity, let her donate from her own money/allowance.

• Because the child was exposed to bad visual images for a long time, these need to be replaced by other positive visual images that will help refocus the child's emotions. A good DVD that we recommend is called "Mercy to Mankind" produced by MAS youth in Dallas Texas. The address to order is www.atasproduction.com. In addition to this, please look for other quality Islamic videos/DVDs for children. Please visit ISNA media mall at www.isna.net as well as the ICNA web page at www.icna.org for further productions. Please watch these visual productions with her on a regular

basis. Reading Islamic stories is also good, so you should continue to read with her.

• As for thinking about boys, explain to your daughter that sometimes girls think about boys, but they should fight these thoughts by doing something that is more productive and get busy to distract themselves. Also explain to her that as long as she fights these thoughts and realizes that they are not appropriate and doesn't act upon them by, for example, talking to her girl friends about boys or so, she will get over these thoughts insha'a Allah. She should also make *Dua'a* to Allah to help clear her mind of thinking about boys or seeing these images of people without clothes on.

• Please follow the suggestions mentioned above and continue to patiently implement all of them as they are very important for improving your situation. It will take time to see improvements, but don't give up and make lots of *Dua'a* after prayer and at *Tahajud* time for Allah to help your daughter.

• One question that your daughter may ask is: what about Dad? She is probably thinking that her dad is doing bad things and there is no easy way out of that because you have to be clear with her that these kinds of actions (watching bad scenes on TV) are wrong. Explain to her that the real role model for us is the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* and that we are all trying to follow his example and that if Dad is doing something wrong, he will have to answer to Allah *SWT*. But also tell her that you should both make *Dua'a* for him and still treat him properly because Allah ordered us to do so and He ordered children to respect their parents even if they have their differences but to always obey Allah's orders before the orders of a parent if the two contradict.

• It is important to explain to your husband what is going on with your daughter, the details of the images she sees, and how disturbed she is by them. You should clarify to him that, in order to help her come to terms with what is going on with her, you have to tell her that watching such things is *Haram* and that she was too young to be responsible for what she used to see at the time. To keep her trust in her Dad, who was a responsible adult when

he did such actions, it would be good if he tells her that though he did this stuff, he is now doing tawabah for it because he is now going to stop doing these bad things. Explain to your husband that if you don't take this position, your daughter might do these things when she grows up, especially since she lives in a society that sees nothing wrong with this kind of life style. If he doesn't stop and talk to his daughter about doing *tawbah*, she will lose her trust in him and it may be difficult for her to stay good. Please try to be very tactful in handling this issue with your husband so he doesn't get defensive and completely go against what you are saying to prove that he didn't do anything wrong.

We pray to Allah to make it easy on you and help ease this problem.

Q.38

I understand from your books as well as other books on the subject of parenting that raising children is a very serious matter. As such, parents should do their best to make sure that they raise their children as strong and confident Muslims. I feel that this is not an easy job and that it requires a great deal of time and lots of sacrifices from parents. At the same time, living here in North America requires us to volunteer our time to help in establishing our community by working together on various projects. This is causing a dilemma for me. I have been contemplating stopping my volunteer work with the community so that I can focus only on my children and their needs. What do you think about this? Is this the right attitude or am I missing something?

Jazakum Allah Khayran

Answer

There is no doubt that raising children is a very serious matter and a huge responsibility from the parents' side. It is certainly a very important and extremely demanding job, particularly here in North America where most parents lack a support system from the extended family as well as from the society at large.

Having said this, it is also crucial for parents to understand that they should employ a holistic approach in their quest on this noble task, namely, raising confident Muslim children in North America. This means that parents should try to look at this little human they are trying to raise as a complete being and satisfy his/her various needs, be it physical needs, spiritual needs, emotional needs, psychological needs, social needs, or intellectual needs.

It is unfortunate that most parents think mainly about the physical needs

of their children. This is a big mistake and an unhealthy approach to parenting, which will not and cannot lead to the desired results that we want for our children here in North America.

To be able to satisfy the various needs of our children mentioned above, it can't be done in isolation of our community or the society we are living in. Parents can't afford to detach themselves from their communities and even from the main stream society, thinking that this way they will be able to focus more on their children. The healthy development of our children requires that we have a very strong community with many well-established institutions to help in facilitating essential activities needed by our children and noteworthy projects for them to get involved into.

It is very important for parents to understand that certain activities can't be accomplished by parents alone. We need the help of our community's institutions. For example, the healthy development of our children requires that parents provide a positive and active life style for them. This includes sports activities, camps, youth groups and so on. If the institutions of our community are not strong enough, they won't be able to provide these activities and platforms for our children and youth. It is of paramount importance that we work hard with other volunteers to establish these institutions and make sure that they are strong enough to help our children in their healthy development in all of the above areas.

Based on the above discussion, we hold the view that it is a big mistake for parents to isolate themselves and avoid volunteering with the community, thinking that this way they will have more time on their hands and will be able to better take care of their children. On the contrary, being an involved parent and volunteering with the community is a proven investment with guaranteed positive returns for ourselves, our children and the community as a whole. However, certain precautions have to be in place for this methodology to succeed, such as:

- Having a clear vision for your child's development. This is a must. This vision should answer the question, "What do I want my child to be when s/he grows up?" (and we are not referring to their future profession here, but more to the qualities you hope

they will possess as a person). This vision will provide you with guidance during various stages of your child's life.

- The key to success is in balancing your involvement with various community groups and organizations, while managing your time properly to achieve your vision for your child. This should be your ultimate goal and driving force.
- Try to be part of the activities planning committee in your community. Whenever activities are organized, make sure they cover the needs of the whole family including parents and children.
- If you are not a member of the planning group, always encourage community leaders and activity organizers to plan programs with the whole family in mind.
- Encourage other families with children to get involved in community projects and activities. The more families helping in building our institutions, the less effort needed from each of them.

Q.39

I believe that the best way of raising children is for both parents to be involved and work together. However, I have to be away from my family for long periods of time because of my job. How would this impact my children? I tried my best to find a job in the city where my family lives to no avail!!!

Can you please advise me as to what to do?

Jazakum Allah Khayran,

Answer Nowadays, there are many Muslim families facing this situation where the father lives away from the family because of job conditions. Of course, the best possible scenario is for the family to try to all live in the same place and be together. However, if the circumstances don't allow for this, then the father and the mother need to work as a team even more, such that they both agree on a parenting strategy and have one vision for raising their children. The mother in this case will be the one who is carrying out most of the plan. However, the father should come to visit and spend time with the family frequently. At these times, both of them should be in agreement as to the way they will deal with the children. It should be obvious to the children that their parents are united in their parenting methods.

- During these visits, the father should try his best to interact with the children and be a part of their lives
- The father should also try to be in touch with the family and particularly the children through regular phone calls as well as e-mails

- The father also needs to realize that his wife needs all the support she can get in such a situation and should try to provide as much support as he can in every possible way, be in touch with his wife, and follow up on the children's affairs
- If the family has a boy who is a pre-teen, this boy needs a male role model in his life. The father should pay close attention to this and be in touch with this boy more often so he can see him as a role model. Also, during the father's absence, this role model could be provided by an uncle, a teacher, or the Imam of the community
- Before traveling, the father should spend some time alone with his son leaving him with the impression that he is the man of the house in the father's absence, and agreeing with him to do certain things related to house chores suitable to the son's age.
- The father should try his best when he comes back for visits not to spoil the children out of guilt. Many fathers in this position do this thinking that they are compensating for their absence

This book is the second in a series that contains detailed answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on the hot topic of parenting in North America. Because some of these questions have been raised more than once in recent years, we feel that they represent crucial issues of concern occupying the minds of many parents. Making these answers available in a written format will hopefully provide Muslim parents with the proper advice supported by the *Qur'an* and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.
The methodology used in answering these questions draws heavily on verses of the Qur'an, teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events in his *Seerah*, as well as the authors' wealth of practical experience, gained from their countless parenting counseling sessions over the years, and their knowledge of child psychology.

Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir as a wife/husband team, together co-authored several best-selling parenting books such as "Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West," "Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope," "Blissful Marriage" and "Parenting Skills based on Qur'an and Sunnah." They have also authored parenting books in Arabic. Some of their parenting books have been translated to French and German languages. They are teaching two courses on the subject of parenting with the Islamic American University. They are both regular contributors to the family section of several magazines such as "American Muslim," "Islamic Horizons". and the "Message magazine." Both Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir are also advisers on the Islam online website family section. **Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir are the recipients of the City of Ottawa Certificate of Appreciation for the year 2003 for their volunteer work in the area of Education.** They have traveled extensively, presenting workshops to various Muslim communities all over the world.

Dr. Ekram Beshir

- She is a medical doctor by profession, with a background in child psychology.
- She is the founder of both *Abraar* full-time Islamic school and *Rahma* School, a weekend Arabic and Islamic school, in Ottawa, Canada.
- She is the recipient of the Director's Citation Award of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board for the year 2000 for her contribution in the area of education from among 7000 employees of the board.
- She has been very active with the Muslim community in Ottawa in the areas of study circles, children and youth camps, sisters programs, and marriage counseling.
- She has traveled extensively to various parts of the world to present parenting workshops.
- She has also authored other books for teaching Arabic to Muslim children living in Non- Arabic speaking countries.

Dr. Mohamed Rida Beshir

- He is an engineer by profession, with over 30 years of experience in Da'wa work in North America
- He has held various positions with MSA and ISNA, MAS on both national and local levels.
- He served as a member of the training and development department of the Muslim American Society (MAS) for over two decades.
- He is actively developing and delivering training programs to various Muslim communities all over the world.
- He is a regular speaker in ISNA, ICNA, MSA, MAC and MAS conferences.
- He is the recipient of the Ottawa Muslim Association and Ottawa Muslim Community Circle appreciation awards for years 1993, and 1999 for his volunteer Islamic work in the National Capital region

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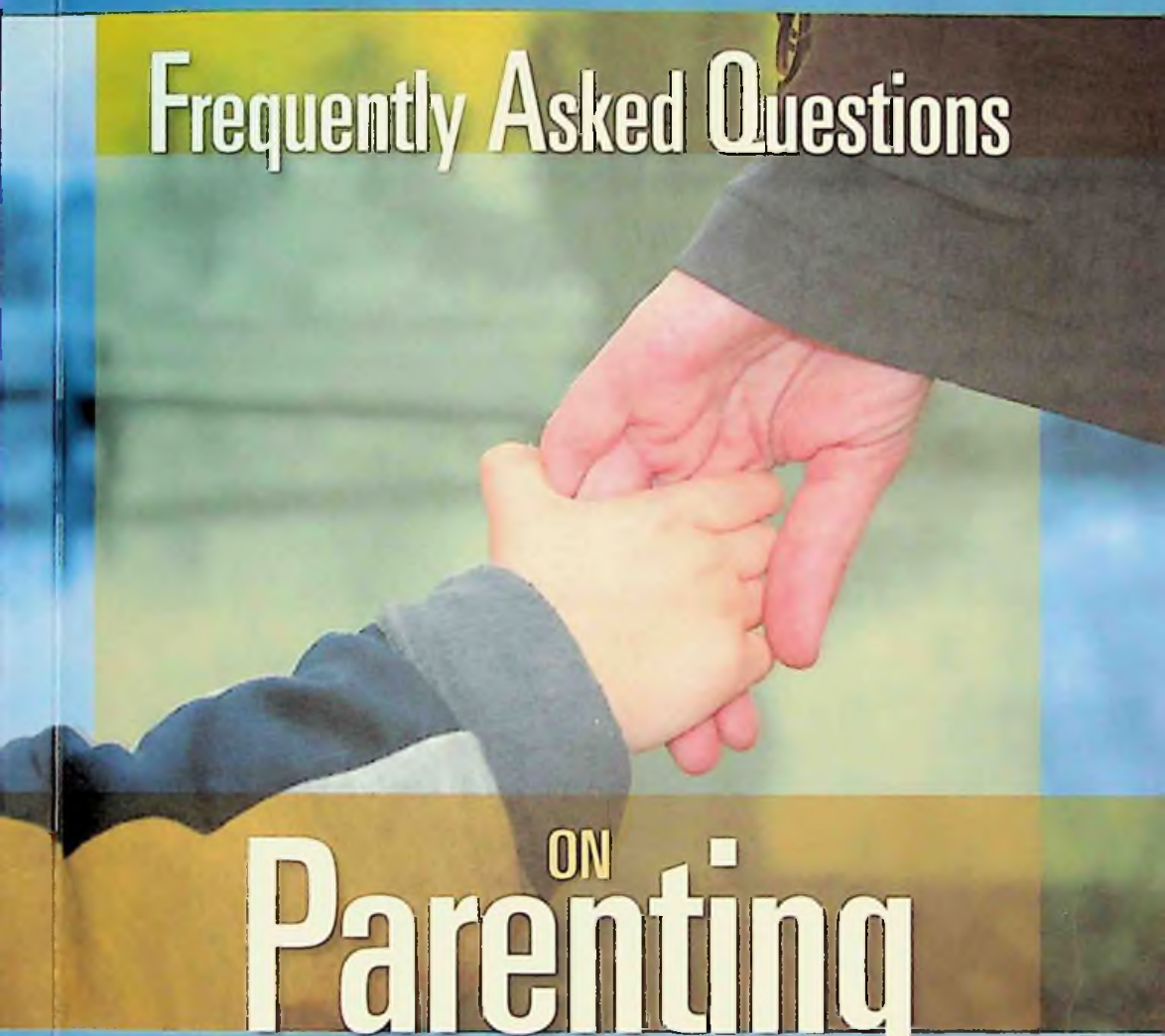
ANSWERS TO

Frequently Asked Questions



ON Parenting

(PART 3)

Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Rida Beshir

amana publications

Answers
to
Frequently Asked Questions
on
Parenting

[Part 3]

Drs. Ekram and M. Rida Beshir

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We kindly request that every reader make *du'a* for them.

Introduction

As we indicated in the introduction of part one of this series, during workshops and convention sessions, we usually allocate time to answer questions from the audience. We try our best during this time to respond to the questions we receive in the most comprehensive way. However, with a hot topic like parenting, particularly in North America, there is never enough time to give detailed answers and at the same time respond to as many audience members' questions as possible. Over the years, we have noticed that certain questions come up repeatedly during our parenting workshops and lectures in various conferences/conventions on the subject of raising children in the North American society. Because of this, we feel that these questions represent crucial issues of concern occupying the minds of the great majority of parents, and as such, they deserve to be addressed in enough detail to help clarify these issues and provide Muslim parents with the proper advice supported by the Qur'an as well as the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.

This is why we decided to write this series of books to answer "Frequently Asked Questions about Raising Children in North America."

This is part three of the series. We apologize for the delay and for not making it available to the reader right after part two as we promised when we started the series. Due to both our health conditions as well as a very busy traveling schedule presenting our parenting workshops, we were unable to find the proper time to put into part three of the series for some time. We thank Allah *SWT* that He blessed our time and effort, and finally with His grace, that we are able to present the reader with this work.

Part one of the series covered a variety of topics and included categories covering questions related to correcting behaviour, environment, Islamic identity, schooling, celebrations, sex education, and miscellaneous questions.

Part two covered a variety of topics ranging from character building and personality development to the environment. It also addressed questions relating to young children, pre-teens, and teens.

In this work, part three, the main categories discussed are related to building character and developing personality, correcting behaviour, Qur'anic memorization and prayer training, schooling and environment, role modeling, conflict resolution and miscellaneous questions. We tried our best to respect this categorization; however, with subjects like these, there was some overlap.

It is important to note that all the questions in this series are real and were asked on one occasion or another by attendees of a workshop, an audience member at a conference/convention, or during our live dialogue on various websites such as www.masnet.org and www.islamonline.net.

We would also like to emphasize that our methodology in answering these questions will, as is always the case with our books, be from an Islamic perspective, drawing heavily on verses of the Qur'an, teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events of his *Seerah*. We will also, *insha'a* Allah, draw on the practical experience we have *walhamdulilah* gained from countless parenting and counseling sessions during the last two decades and our knowledge of child psychology.

We realize that this is a huge responsibility and we sincerely pray to Allah SWT to help us provide the right answers to these questions as well as to make this series benefit as many Muslim families as possible in their quest to be the best Muslim parents for their children. We also ask Him to protect our Muslim families, our Muslim youth, our Muslim children and the whole Muslim *Ummah*.

Readers may kindly note that throughout the book, all the Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* mentioned are the English translations of the meaning of the original text in Arabic. Though we have striven to use the most accurate English translations available, we remind the reader that any and all translations are: firstly, not the original words of Allah *SWT* or His prophet *SAAW*, and secondly, can never be as accurate as the original Arabic text.

Drs. Ekram & M. Rida Beshir

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BUILDING CHARACTER AND DEVELOPING PERSONALITY

How to promote critical thinking among our children when the child asks a lot of questions and we get bugged, irritated, and angry by the way they ask their question?

Answer Promoting critical thinking in our children is a very important matter because it teaches them how to make the right choice between alternatives. Parents are not going to be around their kids all the time when they are faced with a problem so they can help them in making the right choice. As such it is crucial to help them on how to make the right decision themselves via teaching them critical thinking. This is particularly true in today's environment of our children living in the West considering the popular teens culture and peer pressure they are facing and subjected to.

To be able to teach our children critical thinking, first as parents we should have an accommodating attitude towards our children's questions. As a matter of fact, we should even encourage their questions and they should feel that we are welcoming all their questions. Our children should feel very comfortable approaching us with their questions. Sometimes, parents' attitude turns the children away and makes them hesitate in asking questions. In some cases, this attitude has been developed because of the impolite way some children use when asking the question. Being irritated and getting bugged with your children's questions to the extent that you create a barrier between yourself and your children is not the proper way out. The solution is to teach them how to ask the question properly and politely. It is essential that we parents keep this channel of communications open between ourselves and our children.

Teaching our children critical thinking requires the following:

• Training them on how to make choice between alternatives. This could start from very young age. For example, for a three years old child, rather than dressing her in a certain outfit when you are going out, put two different outfits on her bed and ask her which of them she would like to wear going out. Allow her to make the decision and respect her choice. 5 years old child, you can check with him how he wants to spend his weekend. Ask him if he wants to go for a picnic or he would rather spend the time visiting his friend. Again, allow him to choose and respect his choice.

• Consulting with them on family matters and teaching them the consequences of each decision we make. For example, if the family plans to move to new house in a different part of the city or even in another city. Nothing wrong with getting your 6 years old in getting involved on the discussion. It is important to talk about the advantages and disadvantages of the move, particularly the ones relevant to your child such as a bigger pool of friends because the community in the new location is bigger, and a nice developed youth center with many activities, etc.

• Allow your children to make their own decisions particularly in non critical matters. Even if they make the wrong decision let them live with this mistake. With non critical matters, the risk is not high and they will learn from their mistake.

• Also you can use certain games to promote critical thinking with your children. Here is an example of a game we used to play with our grand- children. They were four and five years old when we played this with them. This game could be played with children up to seven or eight

years old depending on the child's maturity. Here is how it is played:

- To set the tone, one of the parents or grand-parents would ask the other a simple question in a chanting tone such as "Could a goat be the daughter of a horse? Is this possible? Is this possible?" The other parent would respond also in a chanting tone: "Of course not. Of course not."

- Then one of the parents would ask the children the same question in a chanting tone. The other parent would respond to the question together with the children.

- One of the parents would ask another question where the answer is a clear No, such as: "Could a boy be the daughter of a cow? Is it possible? Is it possible?" The other parent would answer together with the children: "Of course not. Of course not." Again, please try always to make it in a chanting tone.

- One of the parents would ask another question where the answer is a clear Yes, such as: "Could a boy be the son of a man? Is it possible? Is it possible?" The other parent would answer together with the children: "Of course yes. Of course yes." Again, please try always to make sure your response is in a chanting tone. Kids love chanting and singing.

- After the parents take turns asking a few different questions, they should ask the children to take turns and come up with their own questions. You will be surprised with the kind of questions they will come up with. Again, respond to their questions in a chanting and singing way to keep the fun going.

- Please note that you should take into consideration the age of the children playing the game. The older they are, the more difficult the questions should be. If you feel that they find it difficult to answer your questions, adjust the level of difficulty of the questions to make it easier for them. Don't forget, if you make the questions very difficult and they can't answer any of them, they will give up and may not be eager to continue playing the game.

You can also use stories to promote critical thinking among your children. For example, you can come up with a story where the mom in the story is asking her son or daughter to go out and buy certain items from the corner store. You can list the items, such as salt, milk and eggs, to be bought by the child in the story. Then you can add one other item to the list, such as a door key, that does not fit in this category and that would not usually be available in the corner store. Then you can ask your children the following question: "Do you think the boy in the story will find everything on the list at the corner store?" Some children may realize that an item such as a door key is not sold at the corner store. Others may not realize that there is a problem. For those children who do not realize that one of the items does not fall under the same category as the rest, you should try to lead them to the right answer by asking more questions. For example, you could ask: "Do you think the boy will find eggs at the corner store? Do you think the boy will find milk at the corner store?" And so on until they realize that door keys are a different category than food and probably won't be sold at the corner store.

In the many workshops I have attended for you, you have emphasized that it is very important to raise strong and confident children, which is an idea I fully agree with. The question is what we as parents can do to achieve this very important goal. Can you please shed some light on this subject and provide us with some practical tips to help us in achieving this objective? Thank you

This is a very important question and deserves to be answered in detail. In chapter four of our book, ***Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope,***[1] we discuss the answer to this exact question. As such, we feel it is much easier for the reader that we repeat most of the material covering this issue here again, rather than asking the reader to consult with our earlier book. We feel that unless we succeed in training our teens to have strong personalities and to be confident in themselves and their belief system, we may very well lose them to the whirlwind of popular western teen culture. It is very difficult for teens who don't believe strongly in their values to resist the temptation of following the crowd. A teen needs this strong personality and belief to be able to stand against the flow and say no to certain situations. The clash is eminent, it will happen, and when it happens she needs this confidence and strong personality.

A teen that is confident in his way of doing things will not be shaken if his peers do not agree with him about the way he talks or dresses. When he is invited to a mixed party where alcohol will be served, he needs to

[1] Drs Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir; ***Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope,*** amana publications, Beltsville, Maryland, USA, 2nd edition, third printing, 2007

say NO in an assertive and confident way. When she is asked to smoke a cigarette or to take drugs, she needs to say NO with pride and conviction. For the teen, saying no needs to be a source of pride and victory rather than a source of defeat and failure.

This is why it is very important for parents to use ways and means of *tarbiyah* that help Muslim teens to build a strong personality. Parents need to use methods that will ensure that their teen be confident in her ability to do the right thing all times, and make the correct decision when she is faced with a specific situation.

How can we raise strong confident teens?

To achieve this goal, there are things that parents should do and things that they should avoid.

Things that parents should do:

1. Help your teen to be close to Allah and know Him better: Knowing and believing in Allah can be a great source of confidence and support for the teen. This means that he believes that Allah's word is the truth and this life is very short compared to the hereafter, which is eternal. He believes that Allah's reward is so great that it is easy to sacrifice temporary joy in this short life. This beautiful reward of paradise will always be before his eyes and in his mind to the extent that it will provide him with the strength he needs to say no to the temptations he faces.

   Parents should try to link the teen to His creator starting from a young age.[2] This is an ongoing process that should never stop.

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[2] See chapter two of ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West; an Islamic Perspective.*** by the authors for various tips to achieve this goal. amana publications, Beltsville, MD, USA

It should continue through the teenage years using reminders, as indicated by the *hadeeth* of the prophet PBUH, narrated by Ibn Abbas may Allah be pleased with him, who said, "One day I was riding behind the prophet PBUH when he said: O' my dear son, I wish to instruct you with some words. Adhere to the orders of Allah and safeguard the commandments of Allah, He will protect you. Safeguard His rights, and he will be ever with you. When you beg, beg of Him alone; and when you stand in need of his assistance, supplicate Allah alone for help. Remember that if all people desire to benefit you, they will be unable to bestow anything upon you except that which Allah has preordained for you. And if all of them agree to do you harm, they will not be able to afflict you with anything except that which Allah has predestined against you. The pens have been lifted and put aside and the ink of the book of predestination has dried up.'"[3]

Reminders such as this one will help the teen feel that Allah is with her, constantly supporting her and watching over her. She will always try her best to do the right thing wherever she is. The intimate knowledge and love of Allah and following His orders is definitely the prime source of all support. During the migration of the prophet *SAAW* from Makkah to Madinah, after he made all the plans and arrangements humanly possible for his trip, he fully put his trust in Allah *SWT*. When the disbelievers came up to the opening of cave Thawr where the prophet *SAAW* was hiding with Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, Abu Bakr was very concerned about the prophet's safety,

[3] At-Termithy

but the prophet *SAAW* assured him that Allah would protect them. The prophet's knowledge and love of Allah as well as his complete obedience of Allah's orders provided him with tranquility, a great sense of self confidence, and a feeling of security even in the most difficult situations.

2. Another source of confidence for your teen would be to know the prophet *SAAW* and take him as a role model. Once your teen has done this, she will love him and feel honored to be his follower. She'll believe that whatever he tells her is the truth and that it's the best thing for her in this life and the hereafter. This belief can come from reading a comprehensive and authentic biography of the prophet *SAAW.*

It is the parents' job to help their teen find the right source of knowledge about the prophet's life and the lives of his companions. These biographies are the most important element in motivating your teen and making her learn about these wonderful heroes who sacrificed their lives for the sake of spreading the truth and making the word of Allah supreme. Examples of courage and bravery in the prophet *SAAW*'s life and the lives of his companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, are limitless and are all sources of confidence for your teen. Make sure your teen joins the right study circles and listens to scholars who motivate and explain Islam as a complete way of life, a mission, and a movement. Don't limit your teen's exposure to just memorizing Qur'an and *hadeeth* without understanding what she is memorizing and without explaining how these verses and *ahadeeth* fit into her everyday life.

3. The teen should feel that his parents love him, understand his needs, know that he is facing a lot of peer pressure, and care about his well being. Parents should try their best to help him face his problems by giving their support. They should make him feel like he can relate to them and they can relate to him by doing simple things like calling him by a nickname he likes and sharing jokes. They should speak to him in the most loving and compassionate way. They should be sensitive to his needs and try to satisfy them. They should make him feel that his presence is welcomed and that he is wanted at all times.

4. The teen should feel that she is valuable, capable, and skilled in various areas where she is similar to her mainstream North American peers. She can participate in several activities related to her age group. She can drive a car, work on a computer, play certain sports and so on. This will require hard work and effort on the parents' part in their teen's life to train her to acquire these skills. Of course, this has to start early in the child's life.

5. Parents have to make sure that the teen's lifestyle is an active one. They can help fill his life with useful, entertaining, and exciting activities. He shouldn't feel like it's boring and tedious just because it's different from the mainstream. Parents can get their teen involved in Muslim activities and have him attend regular study circles where he meets with Muslim friends of the same age group. They can memorize Qur'an together, and learn about the life of the prophet *SAAW* and his companions in an interesting and attractive way. He can attend the *Jama'ah* prayer in the Mosque with his father or, if the Mosque is not close by, they can pray *Jama'ah* as a family at home. He can play certain

types of sports and go out with his family or community members on organized hiking trips and nature outings. He can attend regular Islamic camps, conferences, retreats and conventions. In a nutshell, he can put his energy towards useful activities and no spare time is left unfilled. If it is not filled with good things, it can't be left empty, or it will be filled with bad things. As it was said, "If you don't occupy yourself with good things, it will make you busy with bad things."

6. The teen has to learn how to make decisions and decide what is good for her. After all, life is all about making the right choice and taking the right decision and the prophet *SAAW* said, "Be keen about what is good for you and seek help from Allah."[4] Parents have to provide this training to make the right choice within the family from an early age. For example, at the age of three, rather than dressing their daughter in a certain outfit when they are going out, parents should show the child two acceptable sets of clothes and ask her which one she would like to where going to the Mosque. When she grows a little older, at the age of six or seven, parents should give her the choice on how she wants to spend her spare time on the weekend. Rather than saying, "we will do this and that on the weekend," they can ask her which she would prefer: to go and visit another Muslim friend, or go on a picnic with the family. Starting from age nine and ten, they should consult with her on various family affairs and issues. They should make her part of the decision-making process rather than imposing things on her or simply informing her that the family has decided to do so and so. At age twelve,

[4] Muslim

they should start training her how to handle certain responsibilities such as letting her make up the family budget for the week, and so on.

When you train your child at various ages to make her own decisions, she will be able to make the right one, insha' Allah, when she becomes a teenager and is faced with choices. She won't just follow her peers blindly, rather, she will asses and evaluate situations, weigh the negatives and the positives and, insha' Allah, choose the right choice because she has been through the training and it isn't the first time she is making a choice. But if the family hasn't provided such training, the chances are that their teen may follow the crowd because she doesn't know how to choose and say NO. This is an important element in building a strong personality and a confident teen.

7. The parent should train the teen to be independent by giving him the skills needed to serve himself and survive in his environment rather than being dependent on his parents for everything. For example, give him some guidance in how to do it, and then allow him to shop for himself.

8. Parents should be supportive and empathize with their teen. Be accepting and understanding of her view rather than critical and ridiculing. Parents who can guide through discussion, listen attentively, and allow their teen to express her point of view freely without getting angry, no matter how wrong it might be from the parents' perspective, can help dramatically in boosting their teen's self esteem and self confidence.

9. Another way of building a strong personality for a teen and increasing his self-confidence is for parents to give reasons for what they ask of him rather than simply saying, "Case closed. Do as I say and don't ask questions." Your teen needs a parent who doesn't feel insulted whenever he asks you "Why?" but instead, uses the opportunity to explain, encourages him to ask more, trains him to ask in a polite, proper, and respectful way, and shows the wisdom behind orders and issues. This goes a long way in building a strong personality and self-confidence for your teen.

10. Empower your teen through making her feel good about herself. When she feels good about herself, she won't be over-sensitive as to how others view her behavior or think of her actions. She will be able to stand out from the mainstream and confidently say NO to things she shouldn't do. Of course, this process has to be done in a careful way to make sure that the teen is not boasting or becoming arrogant. You need her to be proud of whom she is and what she believes in without being arrogant and looking down on others.

11. Allow him to ask questions, no matter what the subject is and train him for in depth and critical thinking. The Qur'an encourages in depth thinking in every area of life. In *Surah Abasa* when the Qur'an talks about food, it says what could be translated as:

"Then, let man look at his food. We pour forth water in abundance. And We split the earth in clefts. And We cause therein the grain to grow, and grapes and clover plants, and

olives and Date palms, and gardens dense with many trees, and fruits and herbage to be a provision and benefit for you and your cattle".[5] It is very clear that the Qur'an didn't just provide a simple answer to the question of food; it went into great detail to describe the food production cycle. This is to teach us in depth thinking and not to stop at the superficial level of things, but always look beyond the immediate and obvious answer. Also in *Surah Al-kahf*, we were told the story/parable of the two men. One of them was given two gardens and was very arrogant. During the dialogue between them we notice that his companion responds to his arrogant attitude in this way:

"His companion said to him during the talk with him, 'Do you disbelieve in Him Who created you out of dust, then out of *Nutfah* (mixed semen drops of male and female discharge), then fashioned you into a man?'".[6] This way, he is reminding him of his origin and bringing more in depth thinking into the discussion that may trigger a positive change in the other person's attitude.

Here are some examples of how to use this principle to help your teen build a strong and confident personality

1. When your teen comes to you with a question that may be related to Islam that he couldn't answer to one of his peers, rather than answering the question for him directly, a better way is to identify some references for him and ask him to research

[5] (Q 80, V24-32)

[6] (Q 18, V 37)

the answer. When he comes up with the answer, ask him about it and give constructive criticism. At the same time, provide some suggestions to make his answer more comprehensive and complete. A good way to think of a more complete answer is to use "what if" questions and try to respond to them.

2. Occasionally ask your teen to critique an article or a book she has just finished reading. Try to help her by providing a list of questions as guidelines to the critique process.

These are all ways to help your teen develop an analytical mind that questions and examines the things that are presented to him. He will not follow a trend just because it's the popular thing to do. Instead, he will see if this idea is sound, and has its own merits and basis. Doing this, *insha'* Allah, will help him to have a strong and confident personality.

12. Another very important thing that parents can do to help raise a strong and confident teen is to recognize the teen's need to belong and be accepted. Belonging and feeling accepted is a basic need for every human being. In the early stages of a child's life, this need is mainly satisfied through the immediate family. The common activities practiced by the family create and sustain a strong bond and feeling of attachment among all family members. This basic need to belong stays with the individual through all stages of life, the early school years, the adolescent years and even the adulthood years. This fact was very clear even in the life of the prophet *SAAW* and his companions. When they migrated from Makkah to Madinah, it was reported in many incidents that most of the companions felt

homesick for Makkah and some of them even wrote poetry expressing their feelings and how much they missed Makkah and their life there. This shows that they were so attached to the place and to the experience that they felt living in Makkah. It was reported that the prophet *SAAW* said, "By Allah, you are the most beloved land to me. It is only because your people have driven me away from you that I have left; otherwise I would have never left you."[7]

There is a lesson here for parents when they reflect on this fact. Parents should appreciate their children's pressing need to be accepted and to feel like they belong. It is of paramount importance to fulfill this need for their teens.

Following are some practical examples of how to ensure that this need is being fulfilled in your teen's life but that, at the same time, the basic principles of Islam are not being compromised:

1. Encourage your teen to watch sports competitions on TV in moderation, such as figure skating competitions, hockey games, Olympic events, etc. This will give her something clean to talk about the next day at school with her peers rather than completely feeling isolated from her schoolmates.

2. Allow your teen to participate in some useful extra curricular activities such as the computer club, the yearbook committee, etc.

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[7] At-Termithy

3. Once in a while, allow your teen to be part of a committee that prepares for certain school activities such as field days, sports competitions, or the end of year graduation ceremony.

Doing the above will raise your teen's level of confidence because he will be able to participate in activities with other kids and relate to them. As a result, he will not feel isolated or inferior to his peers.

Things that parents should avoid:

1. **Being critical or pointing fingers.** The prophet *SAAW* taught us the etiquette and proper way of giving advice; It should be in private, not in public. If it has to be in public, we should not point fingers at the individual who made the mistake, rather the advice should be given in general terms, "Why are certain people doing/saying so and so?"[8]

This rule should be observed by parents when they deal with children's mistakes, especially if they have more than one child. It is very important not to accuse or chide your child, particularly in the presence of his friends or peers. This makes him more defensive. Talking in private is much more effective, as it gives the child the chance to think about the actual situation and not about the embarrassment he is feeling. The disadvantages of criticizing in public certainly outweigh the advantages. It is humiliating and embarrassing for your teen and it will certainly not help him to have a strong and confident personality. But if we follow the advice of the prophet *SAAW*, insha' Allah we can

[8] Muslim

help our teen to achieve the strong confident personality we all want for him.

2. **Perfectionism**. It was reported that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* has said, "The hasty one, neither covers the desired distance, nor spares the back of his means of transportation."[9] The "hasty one" was explained by the scholars as the one who lost the companionship of his fellow travelers because he caused the beast he was riding to be fatigued. The perfectionist is similar to the hasty one; he or she asks others to do more than they can bear, and in the process he causes them to be fatigued and think that they are good for nothing because of his continuous criticism of what they do. This is not healthy behavior, especially with children because it lowers their self esteem.

3. **Over protection**. No doubt protecting children is one of the very important duties of parents. However, parents should be aware of the very fine line between protection and discouragement. Over protecting may give the impression to our children that we as parents think they are incapable. This for sure will lead to lower self esteem and will not help us in our quest to raise strong confident children

4. **Humiliation**. When Allah *SWT* instructs us in Qur'an not to call each others names or humiliate one another[10], this applies to everyone, including parents and children. A child who is

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[9] Albazzar

[10] See Q 49, V 11

humiliated by his parents will certainly have a very weak personality.

For more practical examples on the above to avoid components, please consult chapter one of our book "Parenting in the West"[11]

The above to do list and to avoid list, if followed properly, will insha'a Allah go long way in making sure that your teen will be strong, confident, and proud of her identity.

[11] ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West: An Islamic Perspective*** by Drs. Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir, fourth edition, amana publications Beltsville, MD, USA, 2007

I have three children, two boys who are 9 and 7, and a girl who is 6 years old. We try to raise them according to Islamic principles as best as we can. We know that it is important for them to mix with friends other than their siblings, so we try our best to visit other families who have children around the same age. The problem is that some of those families don't meet our Islamic standards. What should we do? Is it better not to spend time with those friends, so they are not affected by their bad traits? Or is it better to allow them to mix and visit with those kinds of children and live with the consequences?

This is a very good question and it is important to discuss since it's something many Muslim families face. Our advice for the questioner is to consider the following points:

• Children need to mix with friends. They learn many things and acquire various social skills from these visits, such as how to interact with others, how to take turns, etc. As such, the wider the group they mix with, the better.

• Of course, friends affect each other's behavior and have a great influence on each other. This is emphasized in many of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. As such, it is important to teach our children how to select and choose their friends. It is important to help them find the friends who can have a

positive and healthy impact on their personality, and avoid those who would have a negative influence on their moral and ethical behaviour. This help could come in the form of teaching them the right criteria of friend selection, as well as hosting friends at your home, or driving your children over to visit their friends, even when they don't live close by. Yes, it may be inconvenient, but it is important to lend whatever help we can to our children in this area.

• The above can usually be easily done in large cities where the size of the Muslim community is considerable. We realize that in North America, particularly in the cases of small Muslim communities, this is usually easier said than done. Because of this, some families may have no option but to allow their children to mix with other children who may not fully adhere to Islamic rules as their own children do. Here is what we recommend for those families:

- Do your homework and get to know the family of the children that you want your child to mix with. You may need more than one visit. The better you know the family, the better a decision you can make for whether your child can mix with them regularly.

- Start first by hosting the other children at your home for the first few visits, so you can have better supervision and control of what happens during the visit.

- Don't invite large a number of children at once. Try to limit the invited number to two or three friends at the most.

- Prepare your child for the visit. Talk to him about the manners and etiquettes of hosting friends at our homes and how to be good to them, as well as making sure that whatever we do during the visit will not displease Allah *SWT*

- At the beginning of the visit, give very clear instructions to every one laying down your expectations and promise certain rewards if they adhere and follow your rules until the end of the visit. Follow up on your promises at the end of the visit.

- During the visit, make sure you deal with any issue that may arise in the proper way. Make sure you don't tolerate bad behavior

- After each visit, monitor the change in your child's behaviour. Evaluate the positive and the negative impact on your child. If you notice some changes you don't like, talk to your child about them and let her know that these visits with those friends may be suspended if the same behavior persists.

• As parents we should also consider the other side of the coin. Many parents try to find friends who have an equal or higher level of Islamic commitment as their children to befriend. Therefore, sometimes we should also try to help children who may not be fully adhering to Islamic principles and may have certain minor behavioural shortcomings by letting our more committed children befriend them. In cases like this, a few precautions should be taken into consideration:

- Make sure that the behavioural problems exhibited by those other children are not major and can be corrected with a little bit of work and good companionship

- Talk to your child and let him know that it is part of our duties as Muslims to help others who may need our help. This help is not only in the physical sense but it also includes supporting others to do the right thing. As such he has a duty to help other children to correct their mistakes. By having this conversation, you are setting your child up to have a positive effect over the other children and to earn a reward for doing this.

- Remind the child to have the proper intention while she is doing this so she can be rewarded for her actions. Also remind her to be humble and never to look down at other children who may not know as much as she knows about their *deen*. Remind her to thank Allah *SWT* for His guidance to her.

- Monitor the situation after each interaction with the other children. Find out if there are any negative changes in your child's behaviour. Reassess, evaluate the situation and make changes as necessary. On the other hand, if you notice any positive changes with the other children, no matter how little they may be, thank your child and remind him of the great reward he will get from Allah *SWT*. In some cases, you may also like to reward him yourself with something tangible. Also use every opportunity to encourage your child to continue doing the good work he is doing.

My daughter is 7 year old. She is a good child who tries to do her best. Sometimes she wants to do something that may be too hard for her. She says, "In the name of Allah most Compassionate, most Merciful" and expects that this thing will be done. Other times she wishes for things to happen that she wants badly, and makes Dua'a for them to happen. When things don't happen as she expects, she feels let down and asks, 'How come Allah didn't listen to my Dua'a?' I don't know how to answer her when she asks these kinds of questions.

This question provides a golden opportunity for parents to instill certain Islamic concepts in the heart and mind of their daughter. Following are some of these concepts:

• Allah created universal laws to govern everything in our life and in the whole universe, particularly, the law of cause and effect. An important part of cause and effect is that our actions have consequences. For anything to happen, a person would have to work towards making it happen. For example, if a student wants to have good grades, he has to study seriously and do his homework. Give your daughter an example that she can relate to easily, such as something as simple as the family's breakfast. In the morning, when your family sits down for breakfast, the food doesn't just appear for them to eat. Mom,

dad, or one of the older siblings has to take the eggs out of the fridge, prepare it for the rest of the family, and put it on the table so everyone can eat. Likewise, we have to work for everything else. If we want certain things to happen we have to take the necessary actions and steps so they can happen *insha'a* Allah.

• The concept of *dua'a* is another important concept to teach our children. *Dua'a* is a form of worship that brings us closer to Allah *SWT*. At the same time, it is a tool and privilege that Allah *SWT* gave to us to use when we need to seek His help. However, there are manners and etiquettes to be followed when we make *dua'a*. Here are a few of them:

- With the *dua'a*, we also have to work hard and exhaust our means to try to reach the results and achieve the goals we are aspiring towards.[12]

- It is recommended to make *dua'a* while you are in a state of purity. If you can perform ablution before you make *du'a*, this is good because it is an act of worship and you should try your best to get rewarded the most for it.

- You do your best and should be content with whatever results are achieved. Accept Allah's decision for you and be sure that it will be the best in the long term *insha'a* Allah, even if it seems different from what you were looking for or trying to achieve

[12] (Q27, V62)

• Teach your daughter that Allah *SWT* responds to our *dua'a* in different ways, such as the following:

- Granting the person her wish directly.

- Not granting the wish directly, but saving it for the person and granting him something better later in his life or in the Hereafter.

- Not granting the wish directly, but preventing something bad that was going to happen to the person from happening.

In all of the above cases, whatever response we get will be the best for us because Allah *SWT* knows everything. Human knowledge can not encompass all factors of a situation, so a person may want something and make *dua'a* for it, while it's not actually the best for thing for her.

My daughter is 14 years old and my son is 12 years old. Alhamdulellah they are doing OK academically at school. Throughout their childhood, I've tried to keep them at home away from any risk of danger. I haven't allowed them to take part in any extra-curricular activities for fear of the culture they'd be exposed to, and the things they might learn there that I don't want them to know about. The problem is that they always complain that they're bored, and they are not very welcoming to the idea of just memorizing more Qur'an as a way to fill their time. They are always asking to watch TV and sit long hours in front of the computer. Whenever I object to this, they say 'there is nothing else for us to do'

Answer There are many important parenting issues raised in the question that deserve to be discussed in details: The issue of not allowing the children to participate in any extra-curricular activities, the issue of spending long stretches of time in front of the TV and computer, *Qura'nic* memorization, the importance of utilizing our time properly and not wasting it just to name a few. Let us now discuss these issues one by one.

• Not allowing our children to be part of any extra-curricular activities may not be the best way to protect them from unwanted negative cultural effects. Not only this, but it will also deprive them from satisfying one of their basic needs, which is the need to belong. Certain extra-curricular activities could be

good for them to satisfy this need. We should not classify all these activities as bad or unacceptable to us as Muslims, rather, we should consider that some of them are useful and have a positive impact on our children's personality. Muslim parents should do their homework and find out which extra-curricular activities don't contradict our values, and allow their children to be part of some of these activities. At the same time, we should help our children to resist the negative effects of the culture by making them proud of their identity as Muslims and confident of whom they are. Strengthening their belief, loving and accepting them for whom they are, helping them to be capable and highly skilled, and teaching them critical thinking are some of the ways to make them confident and proud of their identity.[13]

• Your children's complaints that they're bored is a natural consequence of their not being provided with an active lifestyle. Parents should get their children involved in different activities, and provide them with the opportunity to be active at home, with community projects, and with certain mainstream activities. At home, they should be part of planning various family projects, carrying out certain chores, and participating in family activities. Parents should also facilitate for their children to be part of Muslim community youth groups and get them involved in as many community projects as they can. At the mainstream level, we can help our children take part in certain volunteer activities such as volunteering in hospitals, public libraries,

[13] See "Have a vision" section of the authors DVD "Positive Parenting Skills Based on Qur'an and Sunnah" by Mosaic production for in-depth analysis of how to make our children confident and proud of their identity. See also the answer of question 2 in this book

fundraising for good causes like the cancer society, etc.

• Research indicates that excessive TV watching has many negative effects on various areas of our life. Among these areas are the following:

- Reading ability,
- IQ, imagination,
- Language patterns,
- Critical thinking,
- Hyperactivity,
- Self image

In addition, the amount of violence on TV is increasing tremendously year by year, and it has very devastating effects on our children, particularly boys. Direct copying, disinhibition of aggressive and antisocial behaviour, value-shaping and cultivating effect, and diverting attention from more important matters are some of the specific effects of TV violence.[14]

Because of all of the above, we don't recommend that children spend a lot of time in front of the TV. Providing them with an active lifestyle as a positive alternative will no doubt help in reducing their TV watching time.

• This situation provides parents with a golden opportunity to discuss with their children the concept of time in the life of a

[14] See chapter 3 of our book ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West; An Islamic Perspective*** published by amana publications

Muslim and the importance of utilizing it properly. Here are some significant points that parents can use in this discussion:

- Importance of time in Qur'an

- Allah makes an oath and swears by time in many of the chapters of the last *juz'* of Qur'an such as:
- By the night when it conceals and covers. And by the day when it appears[15]
- By the dawn and by the ten nights[16]
- By the morning brightness and by the night when it covers with darkness[17]
- By time[18]

• Many verses instruct Muslims to take lessons from the alternation of day and night[19]

- Importance of time in Sunnah (the life of the Prophet)

- Two among the four questions that everyone will be asked on the Day of Judgment before he or she can move are related to time. These are questions about our life in general and the years of our youth in particular

• All acts of worship are related to time in one way or the other

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[15] (Q 92, V 1,2)

[16] (Q 89, V 1,2)

[17] (Q 93, V 1,2)

[8] (Q 103, V 1)

[19] For example, see Q 24, V 44. See also Q 25, V 62

- *Salat* is at a prescribed time[20]
- *Zakat* is also related to time because it has to be paid annually after the *nisab* is reached. *Nisab* is the amount one's net worth must exceed for the Muslim owner to be obligated to give *zakat.*
-Fasting is also to be observed in a specific month of the lunar calendar (Ramadan)[21]. It also has to be done between the times of dawn and sunset.[22]
-Hajj also has to be performed at a specific time in the lunar calendar [23]

• The advice in the tablets of Prophet Ibraheem *SAAW* told us to organize our time properly and divide it into various balanced portions to cover our spiritual, emotional, social, and physical needs.[24]

There is no doubt that *Qur'anic* memorization is wonderful and very noble cause, and we should encourage our children to memorize as much Qur'an as possible. However, it will be more interesting and beneficial if they study the explanation of what they memorize even if this is going to reduce the quantity they memorize. Certain chapters of Qur'an will provide them with many important concepts they need at this age and will make them stronger Muslims *insha'a* Allah.

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[20] (Q 4, V 103)
[21] (Q 2, V 185)
[22] (Q 2, V 187)
[23] (Q 2, V 197)
[24] Ibn Heban

Correcting Behavior

I need some suggestions on how to deal with a stubborn child who is about 5 years old. I have been having problems with my son and have tried many different ways to solve them, without success. Basically, he is extremely stubborn. At school, he has been hitting other kids a lot, and though I discuss this with him and warn him that it's not acceptable behavior, he continues to do it. More than once at home, he has damaged household items or made huge messes. When he asks for something, he expects to get it right away and gets quite upset if he doesn't. Once, I gave him paper to color on, but he refused to color on it and started to color elsewhere. I have tried many different ways to change his behavior, such as giving him time outs, taking away his toys or forbidding him from doing things he likes, and not allowing him TV time. I repeatedly tell him 'No' when he misbehaves, and I sometimes get angry and shout at him, but nothing seems to help. He has two older siblings, a boy who is 19 years old, and a girl who is 18 years old. I hope you can help me with this problem.

It seems as though there is a lack of consistency and structure in your child's life. Apparently, the many 'No's' you have been saying to him are being said in the heat of the moment, and as such,

they are not effective. Also, since he is the baby of the family with two older siblings who are almost 15 years older than him, we sense that he must have been pampered and spoiled a bit by the adults in his life. The solution to his problem would involve bringing consistency and structure into his life, combined with affection from both parents, as well as using effective methods of discipline. As such, to correct his situation we suggest the following:

1. Please stop labeling your child as "stubborn". We are instructed by Qur'an in *Surah Al Hujjorat* to avoid calling each others names[25]. When you label the child with a certain quality or call him a certain name, this is the impression and the image he will have of himself. He will try to fulfill your description of him. Children see themselves in their parents' mirror and become what the parents attribute them to be. They fulfill the parents' prophesy.

2. Please set clear and firm limits for your son in various areas of his life. From your description of the problem, it seems that he doesn't know his limits or that he was never made aware of these limits in a clear way, and so he continues to whine and expect more. Since he has been used to not having limits for sometime, this is going to be new for him and he will likely resist observing these limits. As such, this limit-setting should be combined with affection. Be gentle and kind, and show genuine affection when introducing this new element to his life.

3. Practice proper and effective discipline. Reinforcement is a

[25](Q49, V11)

very important and successful method of discipline. Guiding your son's behaviour to the right path through reinforcement is a very appropriate technique. When your son has obeyed you and has done something positive, reward him by introducing something positive in his environment; for example, taking him for an outing to his favorite park, eatery or store. But when your son has done something negative, you punish him by withdrawing what he likes the most; for example, withdrawing a favorite dish or not allowing him to watch his preferred TV cartoon. Another very important point in proper discipline is seriousness. When correcting your child you should be serious. Laughing or giggling and not being serious will not get you anywhere.

4. Be consistent in applying the discipline. Be firm; for example, if you have refused to allow your child view television late at night, stick to it. The child may cry, weep and wail, and may also make a huge scene, but don't give in. Once you give in, the child will know how to get his way every time he wants something.

5. Be wise in picking your fights with your child. Parents should learn to pick their battles carefully. For many smaller issues, they can allow their children to make their own decisions, such as which outfit to wear, or whether the family should have peas or carrots with chicken for dinner. For other issues, you need to be completely inflexible. For example, no amount of arguing should let your stubborn child get out of wearing his seat belt in the car. You need to learn how you can properly engage your child and respond to behavior that you want to minimize or eliminate.

6. Use modeling. It is a known fact among all *Tarbiyah* scholars that modeling or leading by example is the most effective tool of parenting. Please look at yourself or the main adults in the life of your child and ask these questions: are you or your husband stubborn? Do either or both of you display this trait often at home? If yes, your son may be imitating your behaviour and acting the same way that you are behaving. As such, if you want to change your son, make an attempt to change yourself first. A combination of stubborn child and stubborn parent may lead to a lot of tension.

7. When correcting your son, don't be harsh, and try to control your anger. Be firm and assertive, but under no condition should you lose control and start shouting and yelling at your son. If he doesn't obey your instructions, simply repeat them again in an assertive and calm voice, but neither give up to his demands nor lose your temper and become angry. As soon as your son detects anger in your voice, he will respond the same way and continue to demonstrate negative behaviour.

We also encourage you to look on the positive side. What you may consider stubbornness may just be a combination of persistence and willfulness. These are traits of leadership that, if handled properly when your child is young, will help your child to grow to be a very effective and leading member of the *Ummah*, not just a follower. As such, stubbornness can mean that your child is spirited, sure of himself, and probably demonstrates a lot of stick-to-itiveness. Try the above suggestions even if it may be difficult for you, so we can have a good Muslim leader in the near future *insha'a* Allah. It is worth the effort, and the reward from Allah is so beautiful.

If this doesn't work and he continues to displays this irritable behavior constantly out side home, this requires a professional evaluation most probably by a pediatric mental health professional. It is important to find out if there is any family history of mood disorder or other type of emotional condition. The mental health professional should also look at the possibility of any major changes or transitions in the life of your child in particular and in your family in general that may be contributing to this problem.

How can I help my angry child? I have 5 year-old boy who seems to always be angry for one reason or another. I'm not sure what is causing all of anger, or what the reason for it could be. Can you please suggest some tips on how to deal with this situation? I really appreciate your help. Thank you

Answer To start with, let us agree that anger is a natural emotion and is created by Allah for certain reasons. As such, no person or family can be anger-proof. However, there are ways you can help your child get a handle on anger. Here are some suggestions for you to consider:

• **Inner peace.**

There is no doubt that a person who is connected to Allah *SWT* is usually calmer, and feels more peaceful and content. As such, in *Surah Al-ra'd*, Allah reminds us to remember Him so our hearts will be in a state of comfort and serenity[26]. Research has shown, and our experience supports this observation, that parents and children who are connected to Allah, get angry with each other less often. As such, we recommend that parents invest in the spiritual development of their children and should link them to their creator to help them achieve inner peace[27]. The connected child, growing up with a sense of well- being, will still get angry, but he or she learns to handle the anger in

[26] (Q13, V 28)

[27] See Chapter two of our book ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West; An Islamic Perspective*** on tips on how to link your child with the Creator

such a way that it does not take over his or her personality. Parents who are connected and have inner peace will invest time into getting to know their children well, so they are less likely to create situations that provoke them and their children to anger. Attached parents know they don't have to be harsh to be in control.

The unconnected child operates from inner turmoil. He has no inner peace. Down deep this child feels something important is missing in himself and he is angry about it. (This feeling may continue into adulthood.) This void is likely to reveal itself as anger toward himself and parents, placing everyone at risk of developing feelings of anger.

• Help your child not to accumulate anger

As parents, try your best to be attentive listeners. This way you will be able to help your child work through his or her feelings. When you show empathy rather than judgment and willingly listen to your children, they will often talk themselves out of their fit of temper. This way, you are encouraging your child to recognize when he or she is angry, even for children as young as toddlers. To illustrate this concept, here is a real life example that happened with Aisha, a seven years old daughter of a friend we have been counselling. Aisha was insisting on watching a certain TV program. Her mom disagreed, and she became angry. She felt that she absolutely had to watch the program. Her mom felt that the program content was harmful to her growing self and to family harmony. The mom listened attentively and non-judgmentally while Aisha pled her case. After she had made her appeal, the mom made hers. With calm authority, the mom made

her own points, while conveying to Aisha that she understood but did not agree with her viewpoint. The mom intelligently asked Aisha probing questions, such as: "What about the program is so important to you?" "Do you understand why I don't want you to watch it?" "Could you think of an activity that is more fun than watching this program?" "Are you just bored? If so, I have an idea..." Gradually Aisha realized that this program was not worth getting so worked up about. As the dialogue continued, her eyes dried and her reddened face relaxed. The mom ended this encounter with a chuckle about how Aisha had let such a stupid program upset her. Aisha's mom also went outside to skip rope with her daughter instead.

• **Model**

In counseling parents of angry children, we have found two main causes for their anger: Sometimes, there is a lot of family anger – the mother and/or father is on edge all the time and the child incorporates these feelings as part of herself; the other main cause is that the child feels angry because her sense of well-being is threatened. Helping angry children to control their anger starts with the proper modelling from the parents. Parents have to learn how to control their anger and if for any reason they have to express it, they should learn how to express it properly. The Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* gave us lots of advice on controlling our anger[28]. Not only this, but he, *SAAW*, also prescribed several methods for managing it[29]. Parents should

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[28] See chapter 2 of our book ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West: An Islamic Perspective*** published by amana- publications

[29] See chapter 2 of our book ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West; an Islamic Perspective*** published by amana- publications

learn these techniques and model them for their children to help reduce and control their anger.

Modelling how to express anger also helps in having a less angry child. Anger that is expressed inappropriately blocks your ability to discipline wisely and puts a barrier between you and your child. Displays of anger scare children and put them on the defensive. They will either retreat into a protective shell or grow to have an angry personality themselves. Small children are devastated by the sight of big, scary, out-of-control daddy or raging mommy. They fear that the parent will stop loving them, hurt them, or leave. You don't want your child to have to squelch the flow of his normal feelings because he's frightened of what he might set off in you. Staying calm in the face of any feeling (anger, fear, even love) is a measure of emotional maturity. Your child will learn how to handle his anger by watching you. Communicating your expectations to the child before hand of what makes you angry will also help reduce angry situations.

• Emphasize the child's positive actions

Try to think about some of the good traits that your angry child possesses. Praise these traits and talk about them in a positive tone. Don't dwell on the bad behaviour of your angry child. It's devastating for a child to feel that she is a "bad kid." Unless that feeling is reversed, the child grows up acting the part. To get the "bad" feeling out of your child, intervene with a reassuring "You're not bad, you're just young, and young people sometimes do foolish things. But Daddy is going to help you stop doing these things so you will grow up feeling like you are the nice person I know you are." This sends a message to your child that

you care enough to find the good child beneath the bad behavior. Also remember, Sister, that no one is perfect. The prophet *SAAW* has said: "All sons of Adam make mistakes, and the best of those who makes errors are those who try to repent and correct their mistakes.[30]"

Mistakes are a good way to learn. Try to do a lot of learning in your family. When one of you makes a mistake, try to comment: "Now, what can we learn from this situation?" If the anger button gets pushed this won't work. Be careful not to react in an angry way when someone spills his milk or tears his pants. Just say, "Now what can we learn from this?" Then, maybe even have a laugh over it.

[30] Ahmad, Ibn Majjah and others

I'm having a big problem with some of my children. I think they lie to me in many instances, and I don't know why. I know that lying is a very bad quality, and that Muslims shouldn't lie. I would like to raise my children as honest and trustworthy Muslims. I don't want them to lie to me or to anyone else, for that matter. Do you have any advice for me? I really appreciate your help in this matter. Thank you

Telling the truth and being honest is a universal value recognized by all religious as well non religious communities. Islam emphasizes this important fact in many verses of the Qur'an in various ways. In some verses Allah praises those who are truthful.[31] In other verses He says that on the Day of Judgment, truthfulness will benefit those who practiced it in this life and that they will be rewarded with Paradise.[32] The sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* are also full of great advice relating to this important subject, such as the fact that truthfulness will lead to paradise and telling lies will lead to hellfire.[33]

I wish the questioner was more specific. It would have helped us tremendously in answering the question if we knew the age of the child who is lying, how many children there are, their various age, and a little information on the family dynamics. This would have been greatly

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[31] (Q19, V54)

[32] (Q5, V119)

[33] See the book of ***Riad-ul Saleheen***, chapter four (Truthfulness) for many saying of Prophet Muhammad on the subject

helpful in providing a more specific and precise answer to the question. I think the best we can do for a question like this is to provide some general guidelines and hope it will help *insha'a* Allah.

Young children between 3-5 years old are full of curiosity and imagination. Their imagination is very vivid to them. They are not sure where the real ends and the unreal begins. This could be one of the reasons they love stories. Also, because of this they can make up imaginary stories occasionally. Some parents confuse this with lying, but it is not for this age group. It is part of the way they express their imaginations. Parents shouldn't be alarmed about this unless it becomes excessive. As a matter of fact, a little imagination and expressing this imagination is a good thing. When this becomes too much, the reason may be that the child is left alone for long periods of time without engaging in activity with other children. The remedy is simple in such cases, mainly, to do the following two things:

1. Find other children in the same age group and provide the child with the opportunity to play and spend time with those children

2. Ask yourself as a parent if your child is spending enough "relaxed" time with you. If not, please make sure you provide him with a lot of this kind of companionship, including hugging, gentle play-wrestling, and piggyback rides. The Prophet *SAAW* use to carry Al-Hassan and Al Hussain, his grandsons, on his back and act like a camel for them and he uses to tell them, "the best camel is yours and the best riders are you."[34]

[34] Muslim

The above two suggestions are enough to help reduce excessive imagination by children.

As for older children, when they lie, we should ask ourselves why they do this. The key to solving their lying is to find the reason for why they are doing it in the first place. Everyone, adult or child, gets into a jam occasionally when the only tactful way out is a small lie. Psychologists say that this is not a cause for alarm unless it becomes a pattern.

Knowing the motive no doubt would help parents to find a solution for their children's lying. Here are some of the reasons that cause older children to resort to lying:

- **Avoiding punishment;** imagine a scenario where the mother discovers that something is missing from the house, and tries to find out who took that specific item. As soon as one of the children confesses that it is he who took the item, she punishes him. Next time, this child may resort to lying and deny having anything to do with the incident to avoid his mom's punishment. Another example is that, whenever a child brings her report card home, her father scolds her for any grade that may have not met his expectation and never comments on the good grades. This child may try not to tell her parents about her report card. When she is asked, she may lie and say it is not out in an effort to avoid punishment. Instead of scolding the child, parents must try to find out why their child wasn't able to get a good grade in certain subjects. Is it because she is not paying attention during the class? Is it because the teacher is not explaining the subject properly? Or is it because the child is distracted and not focused during her study at home? When the reason is known, the

suitable help can be provided for the child and lying can be avoided.

• **Wrong model;** Children may lie because we as parents are committing the same mistake. For example, a father tells his daughter, who is answering the phone to tell the caller that he (the father) is not home. Modeling is the most important tool there is in parenting. Parents should try their best to model the good character they want to instill in their child in order for the child to pick it up.

• **Feeling neglected at home;** Parents' attention and approval is a basic need for children. As such, when parents neglect providing enough attention to their children while they are behaving properly, children may resort to lying to attract their parents' attention.

• **Lack of fulfilling emotional needs;** not satisfying the emotional needs of children can leave negative marks on the child's personality. Among these negative marks can be lying.

• **Parents not fulfilling their promises to children**; many parents make lots of promises to their children without thinking about them or having the intention to honor such promises. When this is done repeatedly, children lose trust in these promises and in almost everything parents tell them to do. They try to escape from carrying out any of the parents' orders and this can lead them to lie to their parents.

• **Bad company;** many children spend lots of time outside home. If their friends lie, they may pick up the same bad habit. The Prophet *SAAW* warned us of befriending those who may have a negative effect on us.[35] As such, it is important that we teach our children the proper criteria for selecting friends, as well as help in seeing those good friends by driving our children to their houses to visit, or hosting those friends in our home.

• **The love of being popular and in the spotlight**; many children want to belong to the popular group at the school. One way of doing this is to posses things to show that they are worthy of being part of the popular group. Another way is to give the already "popular kids" gifts in order to be accepted. When parents of those children don't buy them what they ask for, they (the children) may resort to lying to get these things.

[35] Ahmad and Al-Bayhaqy

I have four children. The first two are 15 and 14 years old. The second are 6 and 7 years old. They are all boys. The older two boys have been fighting with each other since they were very young. I can't remember exactly when they started fighting, maybe as early as when they were 5 and 4 years old. No matter what I did, they would get along for extremely brief periods, then start fighting again for the most trivial reasons. Recently I noticed that the two youngest boys have also started fighting with each other for any and everything. What is happening with my children? Our home is not bearable any more. Is this sibling rivalry? How can I stop their fighting and get them to love and care for each other? Please help. Thank you in advance.

Answer To answer this question, it is important for parents to understand the underlying reasons for sibling rivalry. The more parents know about the reasons, the better they are equipped to be able to reduce it in their family. Here are the main reasons for sibling rivalry:

- Lack of fairness from the parents' side. This means that one or both parents favor one or more of their children over the others

- Comparing siblings. This creates a negative atmosphere in the family and almost always leads to sibling rivalry.

• Inconsistency or even perceived inconsistency on the parents' side in their dealings with the children, either when they make the same mistake, or even when they have a similar achievement.

Here are some guidelines to help this family reduce sibling rivalry among their children:

• As usual, modeling comes at the top of these guidelines. When parents avoid arguing in front of their children and exhibit cooperation in all their dealings, there is no doubt that this will help children to follow suit and will reduce sibling rivalry in the family. Check your behavior as a parent and be honest with yourself. Try to find out if you argue a lot, or if you lose your temper in front of the children. If this is the case, you must make a serious effort to stop this kind of behavior, especially in front of your children.

• Stay positive. Rather than using a blaming attitude and pointing fingers or labelling one of the children as the trouble maker, try to use any conflicts or incidents that arise to teach your children valuable lessons. Take an attitude of asking, "What can we learn from this." It's very healthy and results in a warm and comfortable family atmosphere.

• Begin the day in harmony. When we start our day with the early morning prayer (*Fajr Salat*) then follow it up with the morning supplications (*Azkar Al Sabah*) as recommended to us by Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, it puts blessing (*Barakah*) in our day and creates an atmosphere of harmony within the

family. It is recommended that we do the prayer together in *Jamaa'h* as a family and also do the morning supplications together as a group. Make one of the children lead the supplications and the rest of the family repeat after her. Remember to rotate leading the supplication among the children. Having the same child leading the supplications every day will defeat the purpose and send the wrong message to the other children.

• Hold family meetings to discuss various issues, and use them to talk about cooperation and sharing. Try to make each child come up with stories from the life of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* and his companions illustrating how they helped each other and cooperated in various matters. It is important to teach our children to take after the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* and the *Sahabah* as role models in various aspects of our life. Also in these meetings, try to come up with some ground rules regarding the way you deal with conflicts in general and sibling rivalry in particular. Involve your children in setting these ground rules. They are much more likely to adhere to rules if they were part of setting them in the first place.

• Set limits that everyone in the family must respect. Make these red flag limits part of the above agreed upon rules.

• Listen—really listen—to how your children feel about what's going on in the family.

• Be there for each child. Set aside "alone time" for each child and make sure each child has enough time and space of their own.

• Plan family activities that are fun for everyone such as picnics, sports where all family members can participate, bowling or curling, etc.

• Teach your kids positive ways to get attention from each other, such as proposing an interesting game to the other sibling, sharing a book or a toy for the younger siblings, or watching an interesting DVD together, etc.

• Set your kids up to cooperate rather than compete. You can do this by rewarding all actions of cooperation.

• Don't compare siblings to each other; rather, try to compare the progress of each child separately. For example, use opportunities such as the month of Ramadan or two Eids to compare a child's progress in various areas, such as the amount of Qur'an learned.

• Sometimes, it's best not to intervene, particularly in minor situations. Let your children try to find solutions for their own quarrels on their own. This will go a long way in training them in conflict resolution, and will help them develop the skills to work out their conflicts on their own.

• Use times of calm to teach conflict resolution, when the atmosphere is conducive to cooperation. Trying to teach conflict resolution in the heat of the moment does not work, as each child becomes defensive and refuses to cooperate.

• Don't yell or lecture. Not only is it not effective, but yelling

and shouting will have negative effects on the parent-child relationship.

• It doesn't matter "who started it," because it takes two to make a quarrel. As such, don't waste time trying to dig deep to find out who started each squabble; rather, focus on moving forward to find the right solution. Be consistent about this.

• Sometimes humour is the best medicine. Try to find something funny about the situation at hand and make a joke about it. This can easily defuse the conflict and may end up with everybody laughing. Be careful and make sure that the joke is not perceived as you picking on one of the children. Keep your jokes general and gender neutral.

• Promote empathy, understanding and compassion.

• Ignore small issues; address big ones. Learn how to overlook minor issues and focus on important matters that may leave your children feeling resentment or have a long term negative impact on their relationship

• Children do not have to be treated equally. Although parents should try to be fair with their children, there are times and circumstances where you may have to treat them differently. Take into consideration the age of the child, her ability, the circumstances around the incident at hand, etc.

• Every child is a favourite (refuse to hold up one child as a role model). Parents should be able to find each child's special talent, enhance it, and promote it.

• Time share. Togetherness is very important and to be able to spend time together with each child, try to get them involved while you are doing other activities.

Q. 10

We are a very conservative family and we try our best to raise our children as good Muslims. I have problems with one of my daughters who started high school this year and is currently in grade nine. As you know, in high school, many girls wear make up. One day she asked me if she could wear make up to school like the other girls. I was shocked and responded by telling her, 'how you dare ask me something like this? You know better. Of course you can't wear make up to the school.' She didn't take no for an answer. She said, 'Why not? Other girls at school wear make up. What is wrong with wearing make up?' I became upset and frustrated, and started shouting at her, telling her she was Muslim and she couldn't do things like this. She went back to her room and slammed the door. For the next week or so she was very angry with me, didn't want to eat dinner with the family, and stayed most of the time in her room when she was at home. One morning, she came downstairs, and to my surprise, she was wearing lipstick. I was shocked and asked her what she thought she was doing, and if she actually thought I'd let her go to

school like that. I told her to go upstairs at once and clean her face before going to school. She shouted back saying, 'This is too much. I can't live in this house like this anymore. I'm not going to remove the lipstick. I'll go to school this way.' At this point, I blocked the door so she couldn't leave the house and ordered her to go upstairs again. She went upstairs to her room and slammed the door again and didn't go to school that day.

The tension between me and her now is very high and I don't know what to do. My question to you is whether I did the right thing preventing her from going out wearing lipstick, or not. Is it wrong to say no to our teens when they do things like this? If what I did is not proper can you please suggest a better way for me to be able to handle these kinds of situations in the future?

Answer This is a very important question and we thank the sister for giving us enough details to help us in providing as much analysis as we can in our answer. We hope the following points respond to most if not all the issues that were raised in the question:

• After the first time your daughter asked you about wearing l ipstick, you mentioned that "I became upset and frustrated, and

started shouting at her, telling her she was Muslim and she couldn't do things like this." This is not the correct way to deal with your children. A parent yelling has a very negative effect on the wellbeing of the children, as well as on the relationship between parents and children. In addition to humiliating the child, research proves that yelling affects the emotional health of the child; it lowers the child's self esteem, and affects her confidence negatively.

• To be able to raise your children properly, you need be in control of your actions with them. Yelling and shouting is not a sign of control at all. "It was reported on the authority of Abu Huraira, *RAA* that the messenger of Allah, *SAAW*, said, 'The strong person is not that who wrestles but the strong person is the one who controls himself in a fit of rage.'"[36]

• We don't really know what you mean by very conservative family in your question, and as such we will fall back on our experience in this area. In the past, while counseling other families who described themselves as conservative, we found out that they put lots of emphasis on the amount of knowledge their children have about Islam, such as how much Qur'an they memorize and how many *Ahadeeth* of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* they know, which we feel is very important. However, at the same time, they neglected to give the opportunity to their children to ingrain this knowledge in their hearts and souls and make it part of their identity. They failed to make their children internalize this knowledge and elevate them to the level of

[36] Agreed upon

conviction. Providing a loving, warm, caring, and positive family atmosphere, discussing issues, and gently answering questions about the children's concerns are some of the very effective tools in achieving this conviction level.[37]

• When you want your child to do something, or not to do something, it is not enough just to say 'you should not do this because you are a Muslim'. The immediate reaction that comes to the mind of your teen is that Islam is just a bunch of restrictions for no obvious reasons. That is why it is very important to try to gently provide the logical reasons for the matters you want your child to follow.

• In addition to the previous points, the use of dialogue with your teen is very important. Allowing your teen to express herself freely and ask any questions she may have without fear of being rejected or reprimanded is without a doubt a main key to a successful relationship with your child. Of course, this can't be done without having an open channel of communication between you and your teen that is built on trust and understanding.

• Now, let us see how you as a mother should have responded to the situation when your daughter came downstairs and wanted to go to school wearing lipstick. This approach can also be used in the future if she tries the same thing again:

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[37] See chapter 5 of our book ***Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope***, published by amana publications for more details on how to help your teen achieve this convection

- Control your anger and put a smile on your face, greeting your daughter with a hug, and saying, 'good morning sweetie. You look so beautiful wearing this lipstick.' This comment is going to help relax the atmosphere and make your daughter more open to listen to what you will say next.

- You may like to continue in the same tone and pretend you don't understand what's going on, saying something like 'what is going on today? Are you experimenting with make up? Is this an experiment you require to do in your class?' Your daughter's answer of course will be, 'no mom I would like to wear lipstick to school today.'

- Keep your calm and say to her in a gentle voice, 'and why would you like to do this now?' Her answer will most likely be, 'most of the girls in class are doing it. Why not me? I would like to be like them. I don't think there is anything wrong with doing this.'

- Get her close to you and give her another hug, saying, "Sweetie, I totally understand that you want to be like the other girls at school, but you know that we don't do things just because others are doing them. We do things because they are the right thing to do. As you know, there is a proper place and proper time for everything. I don't think school is the right place to wear lipstick, nor is the classroom the proper time for it. And I'm sure that not all the girls in the classroom are wearing lipstick either." It may be a good idea at this point to suggest to your daughter inviting some of her friends over to have a make up party where they can try on different make up at home,

and that this would be the right time for her to wear lipstick. Providing alternatives is one of the techniques Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* used to help Muslims give up certain unacceptable habits. "When the prophet, *SAAW*, came to Madinah, he found that they had two days of celebration and feasts. He told them that Allah had replaced these two days for them with two better days, the two Eids, Eid ul Adhha and Eidul Fitr."[38]

- After this dialogue with her, she might react in one of the following ways:

• She could say OK mom and wash off the lipstick before going to school. If this is the case, *alhamdulellah* the problem is solved. Don't forget to make *sujood Alshoker* to Allah *SWT*.

• She may resist a little and may need more convincing, saying, 'but Mom, I just want to try it one time. I want to do it today.' In this case, just give her a long affectionate hug and say, "Sweetie, you are too precious for me to let you go to school like this" and take her upstairs to help her wash off the lipstick. Reaffirm to her that as soon as she wants she can invite some friends over for her make up party.

We think the above approach is much more effective in resolving the problem. In addition, it is a gentle approach, as recommended by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* and loved by Allah *SWT*. Here are some *ahadeeth* that attest to this concept of kindness and gentleness:

[38] Muslim

• "On the authority of A'isha *RAA*, (beloved wife of the Prophet,) may Allah be pleased with her, she reported that the messenger of Allah, *SAAW*, said: Allah is gentle and kind and He loves kindness and gentleness in all affairs."[39]

• "Also she reported that the messenger of Allah, *SAAW*, had said: Allah is gentle and kind and He loves kindness; and confers upon kindness which He does not confer upon severity and does not confer upon anything else besides it (kindness)."[40]

• "On the authority of A'isha, may Allah be pleased with her, she reported that the messenger of Allah, *SAAW*, had said: Kindness is not found in anything but adds beauty to it, and if it is withdrawn from anything it defects it."[41]

• "On the authority of Gareer ibn Abdullah, may Allah be pleased with him, he reported that he heard the messenger of Allah, *SAAW*, saying: He who is deprived of leniency is deprived of good."[42]

• "On the authority of Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, he reported that he heard the messenger of Allah, *SAAW*, saying to Ashaj Abdul Qais, may Allah be pleased with him: You posses two such qualities that Allah loves. These are forbearance and leniency."[43]

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[39] Agreed Upon
[40] Muslim
[41] Muslim
[42] Muslim
[43] Muslim

We also would like to affirm that we are not promoting to parents to cave in to their children's desires and allow them to do what they want. To the contrary, we think parents should allow their children to do the right things only, but they should do it tactfully through discussions and dialog with their children. An upfront 'NO' and direct confrontation makes the situation more tense and will negatively affect the relationship between parents and their children.

Q. 11

I'm writing on behalf of myself and my wife. We have a big concern regarding our middle child, who is a grade 8 student whose name is Ziyad. We also have an older son who is 16 years old whose name is Ahmad and a younger daughter Fatima who is 9 years old. Ziyad is a nice boy who gets along with his brother and sister. He is also nice and polite to me and my wife. He gets along with his classmates and has friends at school and in our neighborhood. However, Ziyad doesn't put enough effort into his schoolwork and his average grade on his report card is 'C'. Ziyad is on good terms with his brother and looks up to him, but even though his older brother is a straight 'A' student, Ziyad doesn't get motivated by this or try to follow in his brother's footsteps with regards to his studies. We have tried different methods to get him to improve: We've written a contract with him, where we agreed that he would not get to go out and play street hockey with his friend until he finished school work. However, my wife feels bad about it and usually allows him to go out to play before finishing his homework. When she realizes that this behavior is not helping, she says, 'this

is the last time I will do this.' We are concerned about his education in the long term, and how this will affect his college options when he gets older. We believe he has high potential to excel in school if he puts his mind to it, and all his teachers agree. Is there anything that we can do so he has a better opportunity regarding his education?

Answer From the details in your question, it doesn't look like Ziyad has a learning disability, and he has no problem with concentration or focus since his parents and teachers agree that he has good potential to excel in school if he puts his mind to it. As such, our advice for his parents will be to basically do two things. These are:

1. Evaluate Ziyad's physical situation and environmental conditions. Make sure they are proper and that they are helping him to do an acceptable job with his academics. The areas to check are his sleep and dietary habits. Does he regularly get enough sleep? Is he eating a healthy, wholesome, and suitable diet for his age and the level of activities he is involved in? These are questions that parents have to honestly answer, and try to modify his dietary habits and adjust his sleep patterns to make sure they are contributing positively to the improvement of his school work rather than hindering his progress

2. Teach him good work ethic. Not all children are created to be straight A students. As such, our criteria of success shouldn't be the grades achieved by Ziyad. Instead, it should be making sure that he is reaching his potential as far as studying and schoolwork is concerned. This can only be done by teaching him good

work habits, and making sure that the home environment is conducive for him to follow these good work habits. Among these good work habits is that when he comes home form the school, he relaxes for 15 to 20 minutes with a light snack, then starts his homework. Also, he may take reasonable breaks to refresh himself. Reviewing homework before submitting it is another good work habit. To further help him, the home should be quiet during homework time and other kids shouldn't be doing something really tempting, like watching TV at the same time.

Here is how parents should proceed:

- Parents should work together as a team and first, both of them hould agree on a plan and come up with a course of action to llow with Ziyad.

- Have a meeting with Ziyad to explain the rules to him that will be applied regarding organizing his time in general. In addition to homework and other house chores, parents should make sure to include Ziyad's sports hobbies. Negotiating a contract could be a very useful tool in such situations.[44]

- Follow up closely on a daily basis and be consistent in applying the agreed upon rules and terms of the contract. Follow up charts are important and provide an effective tool that helps in monitoring the progress.[45]

- It is of utmost importance to remind the parents not to compare Ziyad with his other siblings.

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[44] See the section on (Behavioural Contract) in chapter 9 of our book ***Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope,*** published by amana publications for details on how to write the contract, terms of the contract, and the conditions to be taken into consideration to ensure the success of the contract

[45] You can come up with your own follow up charts, or use the suggested charts in the previous reference

Q. 12

I hope this message finds you in the best of health and eemaan. I have 3 daughters ages 8, 6, and 3. We live in North America. I write to you as I am very concerned about the behavior I am seeing from my eldest daughter mainly, but also to some extent from the other 2 girls.

The eldest is very defiant; she will not listen to things she is asked to do, even the smallest things such as going to the bathroom, picking something up, helping with cleaning up, etc. She will ignore us completely, as though she hasn't even heard us ask her, and when I repeat a request a few times over, she will just shout out 'I heard you' or 'I know'.

She has become very rude towards me, even making faces, answering back, and shouting at me regularly. She will also shout and be rude to the other 2 siblings by screaming at the top of her lungs to them, saying things like I told you not to touch my things, get out of my way, I hate you, move, stop staring at me. She will even physically push them. They will start this kind of behavior in the morning.

I am puzzled as to what I have done wrong. Ever since they were very young, we would always start the day with dua and Quran first. We do not have a TV in the house. The older 2 were home schooled for 2 years and have started Islamic school this year. They are also doing hifdh of Quran. They have been doing Islamic studies with me since they were very young and I try to teach them the duas for different occasions. They do not behave like this with their father or others.

We have started a chore chart with 'mom and dad dollars'. We have a sticker tree for good behaviour. I told them that when it became full, they could have some friends over for a pizza party. They receive small candy points when they offer the prayers on time or complete reading Quran homework, or listen the first time.

I am making dua always that Allah may forgive me, help me, and protect my children in every way. I am trying to pinpoint my mistakes and use different ways.

Any advice would be greatly appre-

ciated. Jazakumullah Khair for taking the time to read this message. May you be rewarded the best of dunya and even more Aakhirah. Please make dua for us.

Answer This is a compounded question and there are many issues to be addressed. Although the mother tried her best to give us as much information as possible, we would have loved to get more details on specific issues related to the reaction of the children to home schooling and their *hifdh* program, as well as how the parents react to the defiant behavior of the eldest daughter, and what kind of discipline mechanisms they have used with her in these situations. In the absence of this kind of information we will try our best to provide some advice based on our understanding of the problem, and while making certain assumptions based on our experience with other families whom we have counseled for similar problems. Here are a few tips that we hope will help in rectifying the situation:

• It looks like you have a very structured life and you are stressed out with trying to achieve so many things. We suggest that you re-evaluate the programs you have with your children and see if they need any adjustment. Ask yourself what your goal is for each activity you have for your children and make sure that these goals are within the ability of the children to achieve. For example, we believe that a Muslim's goal for a Qur'anic memorization program (*hifdh*) should be to make the children love Qur'an: get into the habit of reading it, understanding it, and memorizing parts of it. The portion to be memorized will differ from one child to the other because not

all children have the same ability for memorization. As such, when we develop a *hifdh* program for a child, we should take into consideration the child's ability for memorization, the available time, other programs in place for this child, and the time needed for play and relaxation according to the child's age. It is much better to raise a child who memorizes a smaller portion of Qur'an but who is in the habit of memorizing more Qur'an on her own than to raise a child who memorizes a bigger portion of Qur'an but is at risk of abandoning it as soon as she is on her own, because she feels that she was robbed of her childhood by her parents, who forced her to spend lots of time in memorization without providing enough bonding and entertainment time.

• It also seems like the relationship between you and your older daughter is seriously strained, to say the least. This could be the result of many years of your giving her massive doses of instructions and discipline, without building a strong emotional bond between you and the children. Because of this, your daughter may perceive you as the policeperson of the family and that may explain why she is not being rude with your husband. There is a great need for you to rebuild the relationship between yourself and your children. This could be achieved by doing the following:

- Chart your own self. Try to find out how many times you correct and instruct your daughter. If you find out that you do this excessively, try to reduce it. Also find out how you respond to her requests. Do you say 'no' a lot to her? Can you replace any of these with 'yes's instead?

- Conduct the "Self Search Process" [46] on yourself to find out the sources of your own negative parental behaviors, which may be contributing negatively to the relationship between you and your daughter.

- Make a commitment that you will try to get rid of these shortcomings and replace them with other habits that will contribute positively to your relationship with your daughter.

- Re-evaluate all the chores and activities your children are involved in as described in the above point.

- Start a new program for your children's activities that is not only focused on chores and achievements, but also takes into account their entertainment and play time needs.

- Make sure that you allocate at least 20-30 minute blocks of play and bonding time 2-3 times a day within this program.

- Work with your husband as a team. Agree together on your discipline plan and make sure he participates in executing it with you, or even on his own when the need arises.

• List all of your daughter's unacceptable behaviors that you want to correct. Don't try to work on all of them at once. Pick the three most important ones that you want to tackle first and deal with them one by one.

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[46] See our book ***Parenting Skills according to Qur'an and Sunnah*** published by amana publications for the details of the "Self Search Process"

• We recommend using the "Indicate, Educate, and Train Methodology"[47] to correct the targeted behavior of your daughter.

• Don't expect immediate results. Be ready to repeat the process more than once and be patient. Changing behavior is a process and requires time.

• Celebrate each and every success with your daughter.

We hope the above tips will help improve the situation *insha'a* Allah.

[47] See the previous reference for the details of "Indicate, Educate, and Train Methodology" as well as the answer of question number 14 in this book

Q. 13

Hello. I have a problem with my son that I know I caused by neglecting him when he was young. My husband and I are not good at parenting, or at least we want to be good parents but just don't know how and find it very hard. I think this is because I grew up in a family where nobody ever cared about anybody but themselves. My mother never told me to do my homework, never checked if I had eaten, and never even talked or played with me. She was always busy with her problems and did not care about us in anyway, but would always claim that she loved us very much. So I guess I grew up to be like her in so many ways, even by claiming that I love my kids but basically neglecting them, being there physically with them at home but not being there emotionally at all. My husband has always been very mean and uninvolved with our family. I've felt that he doesn't care about the kids or I because he doesn't make time for us. He's always working 7 days a week and when it comes to his break in the summer he travels to visit his family in Egypt, leaving us at home. I have four kids, ages 11, 9, 7 and 5. The 3 older

children are boys, and the 5 year-old is a girl. Since Hasaneen, my oldest, was born I have neglected him, as I was suffering from depression. I used to hit him and ignore him just like my mother did with me. This continued until Hasaneen turned 10, when he started to hit me back and curse at me. At that point I basically made a 180 degree turn in my attitude: I insisted that we move to a State that has Islamic schools for the kids, and after one year of trying to move, I finally left my home and my husband and moved with the kids. Then after six month my husband came to live with us but he didn't have a job, so he stayed home. When he was around them all the time, he started to want to be involved in the parenting, and he was very strict, so my oldest son started to curse at him very badly and show no respect at all. He also plays violent video games, refuses to eat, and continues to curse at me all the time, calling me bad mother. I tried to tell him I would buy him different video games that do not contain violence he refused and just wants to play the same violent game. I've also

tried to stop him from drinking coke, but he became very violent and screamed and refused. He insists on eating only Chinese takeout, and chocolate milk all the time. When I tell him to eat the food I cooked, he will refuse to eat all day. He is very polite to his teacher and to me as long as I don't tell him what to do. Ever since he started going to Islamic school, he has started to pray and believe in god and respect Islam in many ways. I took him to the Masjid where his friend was talking about respect toward parents, and how it is very bad to disrespect your parents but he still disrespects me all the time. What can I do? I know it is my fault but I hope it is not too late to help correct his behavior. My husband wants to send him boarding school in Canada where they are all Muslim in the hopes that this will improve his behavior, but I think this will make him hate us even more.

Answer Thank you very much for contacting us regarding this problem. First, let me congratulate you for taking this step and realizing that you could be part of the reason for your son's ill behavior. Most probably, your son's bad behaviour is a result of years of neglect and/or uninformed parenting techniques that are not based on knowledge. This is a compound problem and the solution may require many counselling

sessions with a professional Muslim Counsellor. In the absence of such a counsellor, you need to work on three major fronts. The first of them is comprehensive knowledge consisting of Islamic knowledge in general, Islamic parenting knowledge, knowledge of the developmental stages of children at various ages, and knowledge of your children's environment. The second front is that of wisdom. Although some wisdom is a gift from Allah *SWT* to some of His servants[48], a great portion of wisdom can be acquired through knowledge, since our beloved Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* has said, "Wisdom (good practices) is the goal of a believer. Wherever he finds it he should pick it up and use it."[49] You will need wisdom in many situations such as making the right decision on how to parent your child properly, on how much of your ethnic culture should be practiced by your child, and in understanding that not all children are the same and that you may have to emphasize different issues with different children and so on. The third front is that of exerting effort. To learn all this kinds of knowledge and to provide a better alternative for your children, you and your husband will have to exert lots of effort. The following are some suggested recommendations on how you and your husband can proceed insha'a Allah:

First: To find out the sources of negative parental bahvior you and your husband have, we would recommend that both of you conduct the Self Search. This will help both of you in identifying your parenting shortcomings and strengths. Make a list of the three most serious shortcomings and make a commitment to avoid using them with your children, and to try to replace them with more positive parenting methods. Here is how you conduct the Self Search:

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[48] Q 2, V 269)
[49] Ibn Majjah

Self Search and Self Improvement process

This is the process of holding oneself accountable for what he or she is doing and trying to correct one's actions to get the best results in any given area of life. This process is a central theme in Islam and is recommended by verses of Qur'an and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* as well as practices of his companions.[50] This process consists of six steps. These are: search, evaluate, acknowledge, reinforce, change, and hang on. Let us now elaborate on each of these steps:

Search within ourselves and review all the actions and parental behaviors that we use with our children. We must dig deep into our past, thinking back to childhood, and uncover any hidden reasons that might be the source of our parental behavior. Often, we may be talking to our children in a certain way, and if we stopped to think about it, we would realize that we are doing exactly what our mom or dad used to do with us.

Evaluate the actions and sayings we use in dealing with our children. Which of these actions are positive, supportive, and based on Islamic values and teachings, and which of these actions are negative, unsupportive, and have no basis in Islamic teachings? An example of a negative action is when we, as parents, try to resolve a conflict with our child while we are angry. If we yell, shout, and fight with the child just to vent our anger, we are using a negative parental behavior. However, if

[50] Consult with our book ***Parenting Skills according to Qur'an and Sunnah*** amana publications, Beltsville, MD, 2004 for further information on evidence of the process from Qur'an and teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*

we control our anger by using the anger management techniques prescribed to us by our beloved Prophet *SAAW*, teach our child to do the same, and then discuss the problem calmly, we are using a positive parental behavior.[51]

Acknowledge our findings and categorize them as either positive or negative behaviors. Again, the positive ones are those that agree with Islamic teachings, are suitable for the environment, and help our children become strong and confident Muslims. The negative behaviors are those that are mainly from inherited tradition, have no basis in Islamic teachings, may not be suitable for the environment, and may make our children feel defeated as Muslims. Acknowledging our strengths and weaknesses is the first step in improving our parental behavior. After that, we have to put our trust in Allah *SWT* and make a commitment to positive change. Changing unhealthy habits is the key to success, as the great scholar Ibn al-Qayyim said, "and the core of the matter is in leaving out the unhealthy, inherited habits."

Reinforce the positive parental behaviors and keep practicing them with our children. If they work, we must continue using them.

Change the negative parental behaviors and replace them with positive ones. We have to work hard at this because change does not come easily. It takes hard work to change habits, so we have

[51] See the previous reference for many practical examples on negative and positive parental behaviour

to be patient and keep trying. Changing bad habits into good ones is worth the struggle. The expected benefits in our children's development are too important for us not to try our best to change these habits. When trying to change our bad habits or negative parenting behavior, we should follow the advice of the Prophet *SAAW* and always perform *salat-ul-hajah*, the prayer of need, and make *du'a* intensively, to help us in the process of trying to become better parents. In addition, we must repeat this prayer several times, rather than just performing it once.

Hang On We cannot give up right away. We should put our trust in Allah and keep trying. As parents, we can learn new ways and improve on our old ways. The positive results will be certain if we follow the above steps. It may take longer than we think, but we can't give up. The reward will be tremendous if we work hard and make a sincere effort to become better parents.[52]

While doing this self search process, we emphasize again that we consistently seek Allah's support through regular and intensive *du'a* to help us achieve our goals. We also seek Allah's help to strengthen us by doing *Salatul-Hajah*.[53]

Second: There are many Islamic parenting principles that every Muslim parent should learn to help them parent their children

[52] For more information about the self-search process and practical examples of positive and negative parental behaviours, please see ***Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah*** By Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Beshir, amana publications, Beltsville, MD, 2004

[53] *Salatul-Hajah* is a prayer for a need. The Prophet *SAAW* recommended that if you need the help of Allah in any matter, you try your best and seek His help via performing two *Raka'h* of prayer to Allah and making a certain *Du'aa/* asking Allah to help you with this specific matter

properly and achieve the required results. Among them is linking the child to Allah, understanding your child and parenting with knowledge, understanding your child's environment, providing a healthy, pleasant, loving, and positive family atmosphere, expressing love, gentleness, and kindness, sharing feelings, practicing mutual respect, bonding on a personal level with each child, emphasizing positive action, providing positive peer pressure, and working toward a common point of reference .[54] Try to learn as many as you can from these Islamic parenting principles. Your focus should mainly be on some of the key Islamic parenting principles that are suitable for the age of your son, such as knowledge, wisdom, effective communication, teaching and training children for accountability, responsibility, and respectability; providing healthy and suitable alternatives, being consistent, and providing a healthy, pleasant, loving and positive family atmosphere.

Third: Make a list of your son's bad behaviors that you want to change. Pick the three most serious of them to work on one by one to help your son getting rid of his bad behavior. Don't try to change many behaviors at the same time as this will be too difficult for him.

Fourth: Learn the proper/positive way of changing your son's behavior using the "Indicate, Educate, and Train Technique" [55]

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[54] For a more exhaustive list of these principles, please consult with our book ***When Muslim Teens Rebel: Causes and Solutions***, amana publications, 2008.

[55] See our book ***Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah***. amana publications, Beltsville, MD, 2004

and try to apply it with each of the three identified bad behaviors. You may have to repeat the trial more than once. Be patient and don't expect immediate change. It is a process and it takes time, but results are usually positive if we apply the technique properly.

The above recommendations may seem overwhelming; however, if you start taking the initiative and seeking Allah's help with regular and continuous *du'a* you will see results *insha'a* Allah soon. Also, we would like to emphasize that the above recommendations can be done concurrently. You don't have to finish step one and then start step two and so on. You can do more than one of the above recommendation at the same time.

As for sending your child to a boarding school in Canada, it is very difficult to comment on this idea and to know if it is a good or a bad one without thorough knowledge of this school, their staff, and their program. We suggest that you do intensive homework before making a decision. Visit the school and get to know the teachers and the administrative staff and their qualifications. Focus on their knowledge of how to deal with children and adolescents. Ask questions and try to make sure they are qualified in this area. This is the most important area where it will make a difference in the manners and characters of your child. It will be also beneficial to you if you can find some parents who enrolled their children in this school or other Islamic boarding schools, and try to learn from their experience. Ask them all the questions you have in your mind before finalizing your decision.

Q. 14

My son is 15 years old. Sometimes when he's talking with me, he raises his voice in a rude way. This really upsets me, so I end up yelling at him not to that. I usually threaten him, either with depriving him of his allowance or cutting his computer hours. This situation happens frequently. Is there a better way to handle this situation?

Answer As we indicated in the answer of question 10, parents should not yell and shout at their children, due to the negative effects it has on the children, as well as their relationship with their parents. In addition, yelling and shouting are not effective in correcting behavior. You can see this even in the fact that, as you indicated in your question, the situation occurs frequently. Does this mean that we shouldn't correct the improper behavior of our children? Of course not. It is our duty as parents to take all necessary steps to correct any bad behavior we notice with our children, particularly if this behavior has to do with an important concept in Islam such as respecting others.

We recommend the use of the "Indicate, Educate, and Train" technique. This is a recommended Islamic method for correcting and changing a child's negative behavior. We would like to emphasize that for this technique to work effectively, the user has to be in charge and control her emotions, remaining calm and assertive through out. The technique consists of the following three main steps:

1. **Indicate** clearly to the child his mistake or unacceptable be-

havior in a calm but firm manner. For example, in your case, your teen was being disrespectful by speaking to an older person (his mother) loudly and in a rude tone of voice. Give him the benefit of the doubt and assume that the child didn't know better, and then indicate to him that this behavior is not acceptable. Do this by using an appropriate comment that suits the child's age, and speaking with a firm tone of voice that is calm and not angry. It is important to emphasize here that this should be done in a very respectful way, to set an example and to show the child how you want him to behave.

2. **Educate** the child about the issue at hand using verses from the Qur'an and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. For example, when responding to disrespect, you can mention the following saying of the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*:

"The one who does not have mercy on our young ones and does not show respect to our elders is not one of us." [56]

Using verses from the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet *SAAW* helps the child understand that our ultimate reference is to the orders of Allah *SWT*, and that even parents are expected to adhere to these orders. This will also help parents avoid confrontations with their children. It removes the factors that cause power struggles, since the parents are not making up the rules and imposing them on the children, but actually, both the parents and children are following Allah's rules.

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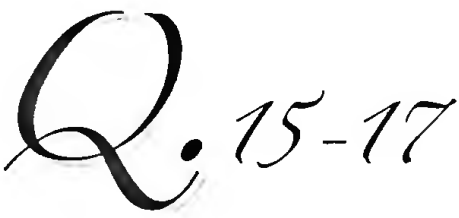
[56] At-Termithy

3. **Train** the child to frequently practice the correct behavior in the proper way, with your guidance. Do not expect that by following these steps once, the child will behave appropriately all the time and not repeat the mistake. You need to repeat the process each time the child repeats the mistake or behaves in an unacceptable way. You may have to do it several times until it becomes a habit for the child. Training and practice makes perfect.

For more examples and a detailed explanation of this technique, we refer the reader to our book ***Parenting Skills based on Qur'an and Sunnah.***[57]

[57] Beshir, Dr. Ekram and Dr. Mohamed Rida, ***Parenting Skills based on the Qur'an and Sunnah,*** first edition. Beltsville, Maryland: amana publications, 2004

Achievement, Qur'anic Memorization and Prayer Training



Q.15. *My son is 7 years old and we always motivate him to do well at school and try his best to be a top student. I notice lately that he has started pointing out at other children in the family or friends, and saying that they know nothing and that they are not as good as him. Should I be concerned? If yes, what to do?*

Q.16. *My son is 9 years old. Masha'a Allah he has a strong memory and a good voice. My husband and I are always keen about him memorizing Qur'an. Our son is doing well in his memorization and he is always a top student in Qur'anic programs. He is usually chosen to recite Qur'an at the beginning of community activities. Lately my son has made a few comments where he puts other kids down for not being as good as him in Qur'anic recitation. I was not happy to hear him speak this way, but didn't know how to handle it, as we didn't want him not to lose his enthusiasm for Qur'an memorization.*

Q.17. My nephew is 8 years old. He is very smart and memorizes lots of Qur'an. He is also doing well at school and receives lots of achievement awards. He is usually chosen to recite Qur'an as an opening for various school functions. His grandfather has a lot to do with his excellence in Qur'anic memorization since he spends a lot of time teaching and reviewing with him. He feels very proud of his grandchild. He always tells him 'you are the best' and favors him over the rest of the family children. Lately, and more than once, I have overheard him telling his cousin, 'I'm better than you and you can never be as good as I am. You see all these awards are mine and I also memorize much more Qur'an than you.' I was puzzled by what I heard. I feel that something needs to be corrected there. Please advise.

Answer These are three questions that share a very important concept for us as Muslims. It is very important to make sure that our children understand this concept very clearly. The concept we are referring to is that of the purity of intentions and motives behind our actions (*neyah*). It was reported by Omar Ibn Al Khattab *RAA* that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* has said, "Deeds are judged based on the

motives behind them. Those who migrate for Allah and His messenger, their migration will be counted as such. And those who migrate to achieve some worldly gain or marry a specific lady, their migration also will be counted as such."[58]

In another very vivid saying of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, it was also reported by Aby Hurairah *RAA* that Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* has said, "The first three people who will be thrown into Hellfire are a martyr (*Shaheed*), a generous wealthy person, and a scholar. Allah will remind the martyr about the bounties and blessings that He bestowed on him and will ask him, 'What did you do with these bounties and blessings?' The martyr will say, 'I used them and fought for your cause until I died.' Allah *SWT* will answer, 'No, you fought so people would say that you were a brave person and they said so. As such your abode is Hellfire." And the martyr will be thrown into Hellfire. Then Allah *SWT* will remind the generous wealthy person about the bounties and blessings that He bestowed on him and will ask him, 'What did you do with these bounties and blessings?' The generous wealthy person will say, 'I used them to help the poor and needy, and I donated my wealth in various charities for your cause.' Allah *SWT* will answer, 'No, you donated so people would say you were a generous person, and they said so. As such your abode is Hellfire.' And the generous wealthy person will be thrown into Hellfire. Then Allah *SWT* will remind the scholar about the bounties and blessings that He bestowed on him and will ask him, 'What did you do with these bounties and blessings?' The scholar will say, 'I used the knowledge to teach people and all of this was in your cause.' Allah *SWT* will answer, 'No, you taught people so they would say you were a

[58] Agreed upon

knowledgeable person and they said so. As such your abode is Hellfire.' And the scholar will be thrown into Hellfire."[59]

Use the above two sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* to warn those boys that their actions may not be accepted at all because they are not doing them for the right reasons. Boasting and putting other kids down are major sins for which we can be punished. On the other hand, doing things with the proper intentions guarantees and ensures that Allah *SWT* may look favorably on our actions, and that we will be rewarded for them *insha'a* Allah. As such, they should stop boasting and looking down on other kids so they will get the full reward for their actions.

Also remind them that the beautiful voice and strong memory they have are given to them as a gift from Allah *SWT* and that they should use them properly. They should be thankful to Him, and the best way to demonstrate this thankful attitude is to use Allah's bounties properly and not to make them a source of annoyance, disgrace, embarrassment, and humiliation for other Muslim children.

Talk to the Islamic activities organizers in your community and request of them not to always choose those boys to recite Qur'an at the beginning of community activities. Ask them to alternate and use other children in the community. I'm sure there must be other community children who have some Qur'an memorized and would be able to recite at the openings of activities. Putting your children excessively in the spotlight may not be the best thing for their wellbeing and emotional development.

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[59] Muslim

In the case of question 17, there is no doubt that the grandfather is contributing to the negative behavior of his grandchild. It is very important that parents of your nephew talk to the grandfather in a very gentle and respectable way about this issue. This is not going to be an easy thing to do, and as such parents, have to be very tactful and soft in their approach with the grandfather. Here is how we suggest they go about it:

- Choose a suitable time when the grandfather is relaxed and in a good mood to open up the subject with him

- Thank the grandfather for his generosity in taking care of their son, his continuous encouragement, and for the effort he puts into making their son love the Qur'an and memorize a good part of it. Make sure to indicate that it is with Allah's blessings and the grandfather's follow up, support, dedication, and providing the right model that their son is where he is right now.

- Mention a few of the incidents where the boy was boasting and bragging to his cousins and putting them down.

- Request the help of the grandfather to solve this problem and ask him if he can provide any advice, since he has a wealth of experience that could help in such situations.

- The grandfather may suggest on his own to reduce the amount of praise given to the boy by the adults in his life as part of his advice.

- If he doesn't make this suggestion, subtly bring it up in a form of a question, such as, "Do you think reducing the amount

of praise given to him by the adults in his life would help in correcting his negative attitude?"

• Hopefully, the grandfather will get the hint, realize the severity of the situation, and start trying to reduce his praise towards the child and be a part of the solution *insha'a* Allah.

I'm having problem teaching my 6 year-old child to keep up with his prayers. Is there any advice you can provide or methods I can use to make sure he performs his prayers regularly?

Answer Training our children for prayer is an important and noble duty for each and every Muslim parent. It is an order from Allah *SWT* that we have to enjoin our family members with prayer and be constant in doing this[60]. The Prophet *SAAW* also emphasized this in his very famous saying: "Teach your children to perform *Salah* when they are seven years old and hit them if they do not do it when they are ten years old."[61] We commend the sister for her efforts to provide this very important training for her child. For this training to be effective and yield the best results *insha'a* Allah, we recommend the following to be taken into consideration:

- Before the age of seven, training children to pray should be done mainly via modeling, and including the child in the activities done by the family.

- Make sure you have an *Athaan* clock in the house and as soon as the *Athaan* is called, stop any activities you are doing and tell all your kids to stop what they are doing and get ready for the prayer.

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[60] Q20, V132)

[61] Abu Dawoud and At-Termithy

• Depending on the child's age, show those who are still young how to make *wudoo'* and get ready for the prayer. Those who are older will do their *wudoo'* and join the group.

• Always do the *salat* in congregation.

• As soon as the child turns 7 years old, have a meeting with him or her to discuss serious commitments to performing *salat*. Get the child to agree to make at least one *salat* every day. Help her to select one of the five daily prayers not to miss at all; say *Asr* prayer for example. Include this in her follow-up chart where she collects points every time she fulfills her duties with respect to various chores. As soon as the number of points reaches a certain agreed upon limit, she will have the right to redeem these points for a gift or something she likes.

• Follow up closely and make sure the child does not miss the specific, agreed upon *salat* every day. This will help him to understand the meaning of commitment and being consistent.

• When the child reaches eight years old, have a meeting again with him and express your happiness about his success in following and honoring his commitments to *salat*. Explain to him that it is time to increase this commitment and make sure that now, since he has turned eight years old, he will do at least two *salats* every day. Help him to decide which two salats he will do. *Asr* and *Maghreb* could be a good choice *insha'a* Allah.

• Again, follow up closely and make sure the child does not miss these two specific agreed upon salats every day. Update the

follow up chart of the child to include these new commitments. Again, this will help the child to understand the meaning of commitment and being consistent.

• Continue using the same method with the target to reach five daily prayers by the time the child turns ten years old.

With the above step-by-step gradual approach, it is much easier for the child to learn how to be consistent with *salat insha'a* Allah. Remember that children have a short attention span and that they require constant follow up, including things like visual charts and frequent rewards to encourage them in continuing their progress. Whenever you can, also accompany this training with stories from the life of the companion of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, illustrating how they loved prayer and always tried to pray behind him.

Finally, for boys, it is very important that their dad takes them regularly with him to the *Masjid* for congregation prayer. Starting from 10 years old, if you live close to the *Masjid*, the father should accompany his son for at least one prayer a day or whenever it is possible. Depending on the time of the year, *Maghreb* or *Isha* prayer may be the most suitable prayers to perform in the Mosque *insha'a* Allah.

Q. 19

My son is seven years old. Masha'a Allah, he has learned how to read the short "Surahs" of the Qur'an and he has almost memorized the 30th chapter (Juz'). I try to get him to review what he has memorized every night for about half an hour after he finishes his homework and has dinner. As he can read on his own, I expect him to sit down and do it by himself, whether it is revision or new memorization. He is not responding well and is always fighting to get out of it. Is my expectation reasonable? What should I do?

Answer There is no doubt that teaching our children Qur'an is a very noble cause and we should try our best to help them memorize as much as they can *insha'a* Allah. However, we believe that parents should keep in mind several things when setting up a *Qur'anic* memorization program for their children so that they help their children develop a love and appreciation of the Quran that will last their entire lifetime *insha'a* Allah. The goal is to help your children learn to love the Qur'an and love to get into the habit of reading it, understanding it, and memorizing parts of it. The portion to be memorized will differ from one child to the other because not all children have the same ability for memorization. As such, when developing a memorization program for a child, we should take into consideration the child's ability for memorization, the available time, other activities and programs in place for this child, and the amount of time needed for play and relaxation

according to the child's age. It is much better to raise a child who has memorized a smaller portion of Qur'an but is consistent and committed to memorizing more on his own, than to raise a child who has memorized a bigger portion of Qur'an but is at risk of abandoning the Qur'an as soon as he is on his own because he feels like he was robbed of his childhood by his parents who forced him to spend lots of time memorizing the Quran without providing him with enough time to play and bond with his parents.

From your question and the resistance of your son, we detect that he may not be getting enough time to play and bond with you. We feel that at this age, it is not easy for a child to sit for long periods of time and focus on the memorization and revision of the Qur'an on his own.

We recommend that you re-evaluate his memorization program and make sure it is within his abilities. Replacing part of the memorization time with story telling about some verses of the Qur'an is one way of making the program more interesting for him. Furthermore, giving him explanations of the meanings of the memorized verses in a simple way that could touch his heart will have a much better and long lasting effect on your child's personality and character than just memorization alone. Make sure that your child has enough bonding and relaxation time during the day which will allow him to re-energize and be more enthusiastic for memorization. He needs to be motivated and he needs the follow up from both of you. The more balanced the program is and the more time you spend with him, the better the results will be *insha'a* Allah.

SCHOOLING AND ENVIRONMENT

If peer acceptance and approval for teenagers is more important than parents, as you have indicated in many of your lectures and books, would you recommend moving children to Islamic schools during the high school years?

Answer This is a very good question and, in order to answer it, we need to discuss in detail whose approval matters to children during the various stages of their life, as well as when and why we should move our children from one type of school to another.

First, it is a known fact that when it comes to approval, children will by default go through two main stages. During the first stage, which extends from birth to around ten years old, the approval of parents is most important to the children, as compared to other sources of approval. From approximately ten years old up to almost 19 years old, the approval of peers is most important to the teens, as compared to other sources of approval. Given the unacceptable norms of North American popular teen culture, in our books and lectures, we always recommend that parents invest properly during the first stage to avoid the negative effects of the second stage when teens are naturally drawn to fit in and be accepted by their peers.

It is important to elaborate here on what we mean by investing properly during first stage. Proper investment means using every opportunity, and using proper techniques, during this stage to instill important

Islamic concepts in the mind and heart of your child[62]. Your objective as a parent is to make sure that these concepts and values become part of your child's identity. It is not enough that your child memorizes certain *surahs* of Qur'an and sayings of the prophet *SAAW*; rather, the goal is for him to internalize the teachings of the *Qur'anic* verses and sayings of the prophet *SAAW* and have the conviction to live by them. To succeed in achieving this goal, you need to put the following three components in place:

• **Parent your child with knowledge.** This means you need to acquire the following types of knowledge:
- General Islamic Knowledge
- Islamic parenting principles and techniques based on Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*
- Knowledge of children's developmental stages
- Knowledge of the environment that our children are living in, and interacting with day after day

Knowledge in the above described areas is a must for every parent, in order to be able to provide proper training to your child, and to ensure that she has strong faith and is proud of her identity as Muslim

• **Use wisdom in parenting:** Wisdom is a great asset. Parents need wisdom as well as knowledge, as knowledge in itself is

[62] See chapter 6 of Drs Ekram and Mohamed Rida Beshir; ***Muslim Teens: Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope***, amana publications, Beltsville, Maryland, USA, 2nd edition, third printing, 2007

not enough. Wisdom will help parents to apply their knowledge properly. Wisdom is a parent's best friend, particularly when dealing with teens. It is needed to handle each situation according to its own merits, and to make sure parents don't compare their children to each other. Children are not all the same and wisdom is needed to find out the key to each child's personality and the best way to deal with that personality. Wisdom is needed by parents to pick their fights and make sure they overlook minor mistakes by their teens to strengthen the bond between them and their children, rather than straining the relationship by being picky. Wisdom is also needed to know when to say "No" and when to say "Yes". Not only this, but it is also needed to know when to replace "No" with "Yes" whenever you can because too many "No's" may have a drastic effect on the relationship with your teen and on the way he views Islam. Wisdom is needed for parents to appreciate the different environment our teens are living in and the types of pressures they are facing in this environment. Wisdom is also needed to ensure that parents can see the bigger picture in every situation and try to always choose the lesser of the two evils, rather than being stubborn and causing more harm by straining their relationship with their teens and letting the situation slip out of their hands. Wisdom is not only a gift from Allah to some people, but can also be acquired, developed, and enhanced by individuals. The prophet *SAAW* said, "Wisdom is the goal of a believer, wherever he finds it he is the most deserving of gaining it."[63]

[63] Ibn Majah and At Termithy

• **Exerting effort:** To be able to acquire all these areas of knowledge and do what it takes to provide the proper training for your child, no doubt, you will need to exert effort. Effort is needed to start activities, drive your child to the location of these activities and provide healthy alternatives for them. It is needed to neutralize the default negative environment, reduce negative peer pressure and establish a positive support system for your teen. Parents should be willing to exert effort and do their best to help their teens.

Utilizing the above three components will no doubt help parents to make sure their children internalize various Islamic concepts and values, an that these values become part of their identity. A teen who is convince with Islam as a way of life, has Islamic habits, believes in higher values, and mold her life according to these values will resist temptations from Western popular teen culture and be in a better position not to fall prey to negative behavior simply to fit in.

If parents succeed in bringing up teens with the above qualities, no matter which school they are attending, they will not compromise their values for the sake of being accepted. They will resist the temptation to be a follower for the sake of fitting in. As such, they will survive the pressure being in a public school and will not compromise their identity. Of course, having them enrolled in a good Islamic school is going to help in providing the support mechanisms needed, as well as the variety of activities to keep them strong and confident Muslims. One point we like to emphasize here is that some Islamic schools don't do enough in the way of activities in their curriculum to prepare their students to interact with confidence in a non-Islamic environment. It is of utmost importance that Islamic schools should have enough programs and

activities to prepare their students to interact with the society at large in the best possible way. Parents should raise this point in their parent-teacher meetings and make sure that these programs are in place.

What is your advice to parents who live in an area where no Islamic schools are around and those who have Islamic schools in their area but can't afford the tuition fees?

Answer There is no doubt that many Islamic schools across North America provide a much safer environment than many of the public schools, while at the same time trying their best to be at par with the public school system when it comes to academics. However, it is a fact that the number of Islamic schools in North America are very few compared to the number that would be needed to accommodate all Muslim children. In fact, these schools are only able to cater to the education of less than 5% of the Muslim student population on the continent. In addition, many Muslim parents who would love to have their children enrolled in Islamic schools may not have the financial means to do so.

Considering the above, does this mean that there are no other options for viable education in a safe environment for Muslim Children in North America? Far from it. There are definitely other options that can meet parents' needs for their children, but parents have to be involved in one form or the other. Here are some of the available options:

- **Home Schooling:** Many Muslim parents have used this option. With the help of the Ministry or Board of Education in their state or province, they can obtain the curriculum, books, and other material required for their children's level and program, and then act as a teacher for their children at home to

complete the program. There are many success stories of families who have home schooled their children, particularly those who made sure to provide platforms and opportunities for their kids to interact with other kids in society for the development of their social skills.

• **Public School System**: It is unfair to paint all public schools with the same brush. Some of them are safe, while others are not, and some of them do a wonderful job academically while others don't. As such, it is the duty of the Muslim parent to do their homework and find a good school in which to try to enroll their kids, even if it means moving to another part of town. In addition, parents need to be involved with the school in every possible way, such as the following:

- Consider being part of the parent-teacher committee or parent-teacher association of your child's school. It is a great opportunity for you to be in the inner circle and know almost everything happening in your child's school, as well as having first hand information that will put you in a much better position to suggest changes and modifications to certain practices and policies to accommodate the needs of Muslim children in the public school system.

- Volunteer for various school activities, such as helping in the school library, helping in your child's classroom, and providing resources and support to school organizers during field trips.

- Write notes to the school to announce Islamic events such as Ramadan and Eid.

- Participate with your children in the show and tell activities.

It is important to note here that while enrolling children in public school, parents shouldn't ignore Islamic education at home. The home will be the main source of Islamic education for children in public school, so parents have to be very dedicated and willing to do what it takes to ensure that their children have a solid Islamic understanding that will provide them with the support they need to be able to safely maneuver their way through the public school system. This could be achieved with the following:

• Providing a healthy, positive, loving, caring, and encouraging family atmosphere where children can freely express their views without fear of being snapped at or reprimanded.

• Being easily approachable and willing to dialogue and discuss any issue with our children in an objective and open manner. This approach will help our children's wellbeing and provide them with useful information to use when confronted with the same issues and questions by their peers.

• Being available when the child comes home from school to help him sort out his feelings and make sense out of what took place during his school day

• Living Islam at home and modeling good manners and behavior for our children.

• Teaching Islamic concepts and helping children to acquire good habits, such as saying the appropriate *du'a* for every occasion.

• Doing things together as family. Get the children involved in almost every family activity and make them part of whatever you do. Of course, take each child's age into consideration.

• Be fair and don't favor any child over the others. Try your best to treat them equally.

I'm of Middle Eastern origin and my wife is a North American who accepted Islam a few years ago. We have two daughters who are 11 and 13 years old. They have been very active in school and participated in Brownies programs when they were at that age. They made some friends who are not Muslim during their enrollment in Brownies. Recently they both asked us to go for a sleep over at the house of one of these friends. When I discussed the issue with my wife, I found that our views on this subject were 180 degrees apart, (completely opposite.) She sees nothing wrong with our daughters going for a sleep over at their non-Muslim friend's house, and I feel that this is not appropriate and that they shouldn't go. Can you please advise us on what we should do?

This is an important question that deserves a thorough answer. To start off, we'll give some general advice to both parents, and then, because it is not for us to decide if they should go to the sleep over or not, we will provide our view on the subject in the format of guidelines, with the hope that it will help all parents in general and the questioner in particular to make the right decision.

General advice

• Saying yes or no for a question like this should not be based on the cultural practices of the father or mother. If you base your answer on cultural practices, there will definitely be different views, and as the question indicated, father and mother will likely end up having completely opposite views regarding the matter.

• No matter what decision they arrive at, parents should provide a very clear explanation to their children. The explanation should be logical to the child, and should be given in a simple and convincing tone along with the feeling of love, respect and concern for the child. Failing to provide such an explanation may result in the children feeling that their parents are irrational. If parents themselves, at some point in the future, slept over at the house of a friend or relative, children may also feel that parents are applying a double standard.

Guidelines

• As children grow up, parents should establish the rules of their household clearly and communicate them to the children. Among those rules would be a rules related to sleepovers.

• The general rule with respect to sleepovers should be 'No sleepovers at others' houses'.

• The exception would be that if the family hosting the sleepover is known by the parents well enough to assess the potential danger to the child of a sleepover, and that following this assessment, the parents feel it is safe for her to go.

• Being proactive is highly recommended. Providing an alternative solution helps curb the children's cravings to ask for a sleepover. For example, parents can initiate a sleepover or

arrange similar activities with Muslim children of close friends to compensate for the child.

• If the hosting family is trusted and the safety of girls in the hosting house is established, parents should also make sure that there are no boys in the house during the sleepover.

• The opposite is also recommended. If it is boys sleep over, the hosting house should have no girls during the sleepover.

• No girls sleepover should take place in a single parent house where there is no mother in the house.

As for the question, if the mom has done her homework and is sure o the safety of her girls because the above guidelines are fulfilled, then the girls may be allowed to go to the sleepover.

However, if the above guidelines are not fulfilled and there is a slight doubt as to the safety of the girls, the decision should be not to allow the girls to go to the sleepover.

Again in this case, we emphasize that parents should be very calm as they explain to the child why they made the decision they made. Speaking in a kind and soft manner will help the child to understand that his parents value him and take the matter of his safety very seriously. The child should not detect any irrational behavior from his parents and should not feel that either of them is angry with him. Also, if parents can propose an alternative to compensate for the child not going to the sleepover, this will be very good for his development and his long term relationship with his parents.

Q.23-A: I am planning to get married to a non-Muslim. We are currently engaged, and I am not sure if she will revert to Islam or not. I'm concerned about our future children. I've heard so many stories about Muslim men marrying non-Muslim ladies, and their children ended up going to church and not becoming Muslim. Is there anything that I can do now to avoid this future for my children insha'a Allah? Please give me some practical advice on how to deal with this. Thank you.

Q.23-B: My son is twenty-five years old. He is attracted to a non-Muslim woman that he works with, and is considering marrying her. I'm very concerned that if he goes through with the marriage, he will drift away from living an Islamic lifestyle and won't be able to provide a Muslim family environment for his children. What can I do to let him see that this decision is crucial and that he needs to be more careful about what to do?

Answer These two questions are very important and deserve to be answered in great detail. As such, we will borrow our discussion from chapter three of our book "Blissful Marriage"[64] on the subject of "marrying from the people of the book."

"As indicated in *Surat Al Ma'edah*, Islam allows marriage from the people of the book, i.e., Jews and Christians. Allah says what can be translated into the following:

"This day are (all) things good and pure are made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time - when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues if any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)."[65]

It is important to note the following:

The Condition Stated in the Verse

This condition of "chaste women" stated in the above verse is nearly impossible to meet in today's North American society considering the following statistics:

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[64] Drs Ekram & Mohamed Beshir, ***Blissful Marriage*** by amana publications, Beltsville MD, USA, second edition, 2007

[65] (Q 5, V 5)

- In the next 24 hours in the U.S. alone, 1439 teens will attempt suicide, 2795 teenage girls will become pregnant, 15 006 teens will use drugs for the first time, and 3506 teens will run away.

- One fourth of all adolescents contract a sexually transmitted disease before they graduate from high school.

The Practice of the Early Muslims

Although marriage to people of the book is allowed according to the previous verse, it was never recommended. As a matter of fact, most of the time, it was discouraged. The following incidents illustrate this fact:

- It was narrated that Jabir *RAA* said, "I witnessed the battle of Qadessiah with Sa'd, at which we married some of the women of the people of the book. When the battle finished and we returned, some of us divorced them and some stayed married to them."

- When Omar *RAA* learned that some Muslims were marrying from the women of the people of the book, he wrote the following to Hozaifah *RAA* in a letter, "It has reached me that you took a woman of the people of the book in marriage; I instruct you to divorce her."

Hozaifah answered him, "I will not do what you tell me until you tell me whether it is allowed or prohibited, and you explain the reasoning behind your instruction."

Omar's answer was, "No, I don't say it is prohibited, but I'm afraid that you may marry of the women who are not chaste" .

- In another narration, when Hozaifah *RAA* confronted Omar *RAA* saying, "Do you claim that this practice is prohibited so I should divorce her."

Omar *RAA* answered, "No, it is allowed, but those women are attractive and may spoil your relationship with your Muslim women."

Muslims in North America are a Minority

When discussing this verse, most Muslim scholars indicate that this marriage is allowed mainly in a society where Muslims are a majority. In this case, the general practices of the Muslim society may affect the woman from the people of the book and she may revert to Islam. Even if she doesn't accept Islam, the children are not in great danger of losing their Islamic identity because of the Islamic environment around them.

The Reality of the North American Condition

When we look at the reality over the past few decades in North America when Muslim men marry women from the people of the book, we find that the marriages often end in divorce. The children end up with their mothers because the court system often grants custody to mothers over fathers. In most cases, the children grow up as non-Muslims because of their mother's influence and their father's absence. We have witnessed these situations through our involvement in marriage counseling.

The Impact on Muslim Women

Another point that Muslims have to consider before making the decision of whether or not to marry from the people of the book is the impact that their decision will have on Muslim women. If many young Muslim men marry from the people of the book, while young Muslim women

are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men, there will be an imbalance in the number of Muslim men and Muslim women at the marriageable age in North America. This will definitely put young Muslim women at a disadvantage. Some of these women may not find a husband and may even live the rest of their lives without marriage.

A Word of Caution

Considering all of the above reasons, our recommendation with respect to marriage from the people of the book is as follows:

1. At this point in time, this practice should be highly discouraged among Muslim men in North America.

2. In some extreme cases, it can be practiced provided that the following precautions are taken:
(a) The potential spouse must take medical tests to ensure that she does not have any diseases that may have critical effects on the family.
(b) The spouses must include an article in the marriage contract that indicates that, in the case of a divorce, the father will be granted custody of the children. If this is impossible, at least include an article ensuring that the children will follow the religion of their father, i.e. it will be their fathers' right to teach them Islam, and that their mother can't take them to church or any other religious institutions outside of Muslim institutions.

Now, it is important to clarify that, if the woman accepts Islam before marriage, the condition of being chaste should be disregarded, because when people take the *shahada*, Allah forgives all the mistakes and sins that they committed before they accepted Islam. The prophet *SAAW* said, "When a person accepts Islam, any bad deeds she previously

committed are not held against her."[66]

For the reader in question 23 –a, we are glad that you are concerned about the future of your children and we hope that the above information has provided you with enough reasons to review your decision and pursue another way to find a spouse who will help you in protecting your future children and raising them as Muslims. As for the mother in question 23 – b, we believe that the above analysis will serve as a good basis for a serious and hopefully fruitful discussion between you and your son. Try to be very calm and composed during your dialogue with your son. Take your time and allow him to counter argue your points and repeat again the various points we indicated in our analysis. You may also seek the help of the Imam of your community or a prominent guest speaker during a visit to your community if you have this opportunity. If not, you may accompany your son to one of the national conferences or conventions that take place around the country and make an appointment with one of the guest speakers to talk with him. It may be costly but it is worth it. Please make lots of *du'aa* and we will do the same for you.

[66] Muslim

Role Modelling

Q.24

Q.24-A: *If their father is smoking and doesn't pray, how will this affect my boys? I have 4 boys.*

Q.24-B: *What should I do if my husband doesn't get involved with parenting our children and leaves me to do all the teaching, and disciplining on my own? However, he still acts like he is the boss, though he does not get involved except to shout and yell at the kids when they do something wrong?what to do?*

Answer This is a very serious matter. Parents should lead by example. They should be their children's main role models. It is a well known fact among scholars of *Tarbiyah* that modeling is the most effective tool of parenting. This is absolutely true because it is a proven scientific fact that minds register pictures in a much more vivid way than words. When a child sees certain acts practiced by his parent repeatedly, he tends to imitate these acts more than if he is instructed to do these acts.

Allah *SWT* sent us Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* as our role model, telling us, "Certainly you have in the person of the messenger of Allah the best role model to follow for those whose hopes are in Allah and the Hereafter."[67] Parents should learn from the model of our beloved Prophet *SAAW* and model good behaviour for their children to follow. If the chil-

[67] (Q33 , V21)

dren's father is smoking and is not keeping up with his prayers, certainly they will be affected negatively by this behaviour.

Helping out with various family matters and duties is another recommended trait that the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* has emphasized in his teachings. It was reported that "A'isha, *RAA*, was asked, 'In what way was the Prophet, *SAAW*, productive in his house?' She replied, 'He used to work for his family, meaning, he used to be in the service of his family. When the time for prayer came in, he would leave for prayer.'" [68]

In addition to the above, the family atmosphere is considered the most important factor that affects the formation of the personality of our children. As such, it is crucial for parents to provide a positive and healthy family atmosphere for the well-being of their children and their hildren's healthy personality formation.

ıe to the above mentioned points, and since the consequences of the ther's actions are very serious and will have a long lasting negative effect on the personalities of the children, it is very important that the father be advised to stop these irresponsible practices as soon as possible. This can be done in the following two ways:

- Speak to your husband in a kind and gentle way about the negative influence of his actions on the children's healthy development. This conversation has to be done in private, and it's important for you to be very tactful in your approach. You

[68] Al Bukhari

should select an appropriate time for such a discussion (when he is not busy, tired, or distracted by something else), and at all costs avoid being confrontational and don't nag him. Your husband may not respond favorably to your request from the first session. As such, there may be a need to repeat the conversation more than once. It is important to observe objectivity, kindness, and gentleness during the discussion.

• You can also seek the help of one or more respected persons in the community to make your husband understand the seriousness of the matter and hopefully commit to changing his behaviour. Help may come via the gentle advice of the Imam of the mosque or one of the leaders or elderly respected members of the community. It is important to make sure that you seek the help from a person who doesn't have any personality conflicts with your husband and is respected by hir Your husband may be open to discuss the matter with cer individuals whose views and contributions to the communit values, but not with any one else. So try to find the right per for the conversation and seek his intervention in the matter.

We hope this will help you in solving this problem. Please try to make lots of *du'a* to Allah *SWT* to support you during this process and grant you patience and self control.

I'm a mother of three children, two teenagers and a toddler. When I was teenager myself, I use to rebel against the orders of my parents and I was even rude to them most of the time. I also used to be very short tempered.

When I got married and had a family of my own, I think I changed a lot, and I'm trying my best to raise my children the proper way and teach them to respect their parents and others. I feel that I'm not succeeding and I feel that my teens are doing the same things I was doing when I was their age. My question to you is, "Does our behavior as teenagers have an effect on our children's behavior? Will they behave the same way we behaved as teens, even if we changed our behavior when we become parents?"

Answer As research indicates, and as we've alluded in many of our writings, there are many factors that affecting an individual's personality. The most crucial of those are family atmosphere, position within the family, genetic disposition, and methods of training.[69]

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[69] For the details effect of each of these factors on the personality of human being, please refer to chapter one of our book ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West: An Islamic Perspective***, published by amana publications

Based on the above, we think if parents have changed their own behavior, and that whatever they were doing as teenagers is not part of their current behavior, their teens will not necessarily behave like them when they were teens. The behavior of your teen will mainly be the results of you and your husband's modeling, which covers the family atmosphere you are providing for them, as well as the methods of training you are using with them. The environment will without doubt also have an impact on your teen's behavior and attitude.

So, if you notice that your teen is behaving in a similar way to your behavior when you were teen, you are most likely still repeating the same behavior as a parent. You may think that you've changed, but it looks like you haven't really made a complete change, and that your teens are picking up certain elements of behavior from your model. In this case, we recommend that you go through the "Self Search process"[70] to make sure you recognize the sources of negative parental behavior you have as a parent and those of positive ones. The self search process will also help you to learn how to get rid of the negative parental behaviors you have and replace them with positive ones.

Of course, you also have to use the proper methods of training[71] as well as providing a healthy and supportive environment for the development of your teen.[72]

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[70] See our book ***Parenting Skills According to Qur'an and Sunnah*** published by amana publications

[71] See chapter two of reference 69

[72] See chapter three of reference 69

Q.26

My husband doesn't pray regularly. He is very good in other areas of his life. For example, he is a nice person and takes good care of the family financially. We have three children. The oldest is 8 years. I'm trying to train him to be regular in his prayer, but he tells me 'dad is not doing his prayers. Why should I pray? If prayer is good, why is dad not praying?' What can I do to solve this problem?

Answer The situation you described is very problematic. Modeling is extremely important, as children always look to their parents' behavior and model their own behavior accordingly. Any child in your son's position would have the same reaction. As such there is no simple solution for this problem. However, it looks like you have to work on two fronts, with your husband as well as with your son. We suggest that you do the following and hope it will help *insha'a* Allah:

1. With your husband

-Select a suitable time to discuss the issue with your husband. Start by talking about your children's future and what both of you want for them. Talk about the teen years and how difficult it is for Muslim kids growing up in this culture. Elaborate on the various risks and challenges facing them.[73] Talk about your worries and concerns that if both of you don't come up with a good plan to raise your children, they might be affected by the

[73] Please see details on this subject in our book ***Muslim Teens; Today's Worry: Tomorrow's Hope*** by amana publications chapter 1 and 2

negative elements of popular teen culture surrounding them. Explain how you believe that an Islamic upbringing is the only way to help your children stay safe while going through the adolescent stage. Emphasize the fact that you are worried that if you don't instill Islamic habits in them now, it will be difficult for them to resist all the temptations and avoid copying the promiscuous actions of their fellow teens.

- It is important that you and your husband have a common vision about the way you want to bring your children up, and that both of you work together on this vision. To achieve this, you must be patient, wise and tactful. At any point in time if you feel that your husband is uncomfortable continuing the discussion, be ready to postpone it to another time. This is a major issue and will probably take several sittings.

- From your side, even if your husband gets defensive, you should remain calm and courteous, rather than challenging, confronting, and blaming.

- After you reach a common vision with your husband on the above matters, mention to him what your son is saying and ask him how he wants you to respond to your son.

- We would like to warn you that more often than not, in situations like this, your husband may not respond positively to your concerns and may even get defensive. Don't get discouraged. Be patient because there is no quick fix, and rest assured that your husband is thinking about what you said to him. You have planted the seed and you need to carefully water it once in a while. As such, stay the course and continue gently to get the intended results *insha'a* Allah

2. **With your son**

• In addition to working with your husband to make him see the importance of prayer for the well being of your children, you should also emphasize to your son why we pray. Try to shift the focus from why your husband is not praying to why we as Muslims should pray and to the benefits of prayer in various areas of our life such as physical, spiritual, emotional, being in good company, etc.

• Mention to him how you will be pleased to see him regularly praying and trying to please Allah *SWT*.

• If he still asks why his father is not praying try to find an excuse for your husband. Mention that maybe when he was young, he was not lucky enough to find somebody to help train him to establish regular prayer.

• Mention that it is important for your son to help his father by making *du'a* to Allah *SWT* during his prayers, asking Him to help his father see the importance of *salah* and to start practicing it. The opportunity to make *du'a* is another important reason for us to be regular in our prayer.

• Emphasize to him the fact that Prophet Muhammad is our role model, and that if somebody is not performing all of their Islamic obligations, we should not take them as our example. Rather, we should always say look to the Prophet *SAAW* as our role model, and follow his example all the time. In the meantime, we should pray to Allah *SWT* to help the other person to also follow the example of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.

We believe that, if you work patiently on both fronts, the chances of a positive outcome with the help of Allah and regularly make *du'a* are very high *insha'a* Allah.

Conflict Resolution

I have two children. Ahmed is seven and Faheemah is four. In order to teach them sharing and train them not to be selfish, we make all their toys common toys that both of them have to share. They still fight frequently about toys and books. Once one of them holds it the other one wants it.

Answer It is noble that you want to teach your children good qualities such as sharing and not being selfish, and we think parents should do their best to teach and instill in their children these wonderful ıttributes. You should be commended for doing this.

When it comes to toys, it is good to have some common toys in the house, as well as some toys that are designated for each child. Don't worry about frequent fights between the children. This is natural and your role as the parent is to teach them how to resolve these conflicts.

To solve the fighting problem between your children you should do the following:

- Set very clear rules of ownership. If the toy belongs to one child, he or she has the right to allow or not allow the other child to use it.

- If the toy is common (does not belong to a specific child) make sure that you apply an 'equal sharing' rule. Set a specific time, for example, 2-5 minutes, for each child to use the toy, then let the other child have a turn to play with it.

- When your children get into fights, don't rush to solve the problem for them. Allow them sometime to resolve the situation themselves.

- Deal with your children fairly. Don't favor one child over the other because of age. Consider the need of each to play with toys and enjoy their own toy.

At the same time as you are following the above suggestions, you can also do the following in order to strengthen the bond between your children:

- Observe fairness in all your actions with them

- Provide them with some games and toys that can only be played by more than one person. This will teach them cooperation and improve their social skills in dealing with each other.

- Tell them some stories about the importance of cooperating and how important it is to bond together. Make sure you do this by story-telling, not lecturing.

I have two sons, the older is six and the younger is two. Every time the two year old holds an old toy that belonged to his brother when he was a toddler, my older son rushes and grabs it from him, saying 'this is my toy.' How can I solve this problem?

Answer This is natural behavior for older children if they were not coached to do otherwise. Usually, older children try to hold onto their toys even though they may have outgrown them. This particularly happens when they have a younger sibling who is trying to play with these old toys. As such, don't be alarmed by your older son's behavior. However, you should try to gradually change this habit. Here is what we suggest you do:

Sit down with your older child and go through all his old toys. Let him pick one or two (or may be even a few) of them that are not necessarily age-specific or to which he may have a special attachment. Tell him that these are his toys and will always be his toys, and ask him to keep them in a special place so no one else will use them.

• Use this opportunity to allow him to play with some of the other toys. Since these other toys are age-specific, he will get bored very easily and realize that playing with them is not as fun as it use to be when he was younger. Talk to him about how fun it is to play with toys that are good for his age and let him know that it is better to let his younger brother use his old toys. Encourage him to give some of them to his younger brother as

a gift and compensate him with something special when he does this.

- Whenever you buy a new toy for your older son, this presents a wonderful opportunity for you to let him give one of his old toys to his younger brother. Encourage him to teach his younger brother how to use the toy and praise him for his efforts.

Following the above tips will go a long way in helping your older son outgrow his attachment to his older toys. We would like to also indicate that this may take some time, and that your older son may not respond the way you would like from your first attempt. It may take a few trials, so don't give up. To help your older son during this process, we also recommend that you be very kind with him and don't express frustration or anger when he grabs the older toys from his younger brother. Try to be patient with him and use a gradual approach until you get the desired results *insha'a* Allah.

MISCELLANEOUS

Some parents put their children in a lot of extra curricular activities such as swimming, Arabic, Taek-wondo, etc. So children are not left with any time to spend with family. Parents are driving most of the time. Please comment

Islam is a religion of balance and moderation. It looks at the human being in a holistic way and tries to address all of his needs. It has teachings for healthy physical development as well as for positive spiritual, emotional, social, and intellectual development.

Muslim parents' responsibility is to raise a well rounded and justly balanced personality who doesn't go to one extreme or the other. As such, the education and training they provide their children should tr to cover all of the above needs in a harmonized and integrated wa While regular and moderate sports activities will contribute positively to the healthy physical development of the child, excessive sports activities will leave the child exhausted and having no energy or time to positively develop other areas of her personality. These other areas are as important to the health of our children as the physical side of the personality. As such, parents should help the child to be organized and divide her time into several portions as follows:

- A portion for physical development which will include activities such as sports and gaining knowledge around good nutrition and proper diet

- A portion for spiritual development which will cover Qur'an memorization and understanding, learning *ahadeeth* of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and making remembrance of Allah, etc.

- A portion for intellectual development which will be spent studying various subjects suitable to his age, and engaging in discussions with parents or older siblings to understand various facts of life

- A portion for social development to spend with her family (siblings and parents), her friends, and acquaintances to learn how to interact with others in a civilized manner

Not all of these portions have to be done at specific times of the day or on a rigid schedule; rather some flexibility can be applied. The key is that parents use each opportunity of their interactions with their child to develop their emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and social skills.

Parents also should use what it often thought of as 'lost time', such as when they are driving their children to activities or to visit their friends. This time, rather than being 'lost time' is a great chance to instill certain values and concepts in the mind and soul of your child. The prophet *SAAW* did exactly this when Ibn Abbas was riding behind him.[74]

[74] See the *Hadeeth* which was narrated in both Ahmad and At Termithy describing what the Prophet *SAAW* have advised Ibn Abbas when he was riding behind him

Q. 30

I'm a mother of three children ranging from 1 to 5 years old. I was very active in my Muslim community and I always volunteered my time and energy to help with various projects at the local level, as well as with national Islamic organizations. I believe that Muslims should be highly motivated, have superior zeal, and try their best to be in a state of alertness to serve their religion. I know that there are things that one can do to elevate the level of her zeal and I use to do it before having my children. Now with my three children and their limitless chores, I find it very difficult to keep my high motivation. Do you have any suggestions on what I can do in this situation to keep a lofty level of zeal, or is it impossible to do this with young children?

Answer *Jazaky Allah Khayran* our dear sister for asking this very important question. Yes we agree with you that Muslims should try their best to have superior zeal and be part of the various projects taking place on a local level as well as at the national level. Of course the participation level is affected by the circumstances of the individual at the various stages of her life. We can't expect a mother of three children to contribute to these volunteer activities the same way as a

person who is single and doesn't have many commitments toward others. However, it is very noble of you to think about this and try to keep a high level of enthusiasm and involvement in working for the sake of the *Deen* of Allah *SWT*. To help you with this noble cause we suggest a multi-faceted approach that covers various elements, to be applied at the individual level, the family level, and the Muslim Community level.

At the individual level we suggest the following:

- Remember that all deeds are judged based on the motives and intentions behind these deeds.[75] As such, proper intentions turn actions that are permissible (allowed matters and common chores) that we do daily into matters of *Ibadah* that we will be rewarded for *insha'a* Allah. So, at the beginning of your day, and before you start any chores for your children make sure you are focused and your primary motives and intentions (*Niyyah*) behind these acts is to please Allah *SWT* and carry out your duties as a Muslim mother who tries her best to raise strong confident Muslim children to carry the banner of Islam. With sincere intentions, you will be rewarded for every minute you spend with your children, and every minute you spend working for something on their behalf, and will not feel that your time is wasted, which in turn will help increase your motivation level.

- Realize and remember that for each time there is a *Ibadah* (worship) that is most appropriate. For example, when prayer time comes, the most important *Ibadah* is to perform that

[75] See the first *Hadeeth* of the ***An-Nawawis Fourty Hadeeth*** by Imam Al- Nawawy, translated by Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies, published by International Islamic Federation of Student organizations, 1997

specific obligatory prayer. Also at the month of Ramadan, the most important *Ibadah* is to observe fasting. For a student who has an exam the next day, the most appropriate *Ibadah* for him is to study for this exam, not to go to the mosque for a lecture or even to perform night prayer. Of course, this doesn't mean he should miss his obligatory prayers. He will have to perform them, but the rest of the time his focus should be to study for his exam. Also, for a mother of three children, in addition to performing her obligatory *Ibadat* (prayer, fasting in Ramadan, zakat, etc.), the most appropriate *Ibadah* for her is to spend enough time with those children, taking care of their needs (physical, educational, emotional, spiritual, etc.) and not necessarily to be very active with community projects at this stage of her life. As such, don't feel bad that you are spending more time with your children and not volunteering as much as you used to do with your community projects in the past. *Insha'a* Allah there will be many opportunities for you to be very active again with your community in the near future. Again, do it with the proper intentions so you will be rewarded for every minute you spend with your children.

• Taking care of children in the proper way could also be source of self development and motivation. Remember that one of the most important duties of parents, which is unfortunately neglected by many parents in North America, is to instill important Islamic concepts and values in the minds and hearts of your children. These values and concepts will help to develop justly balanced personalities with a high moral fiber and ethics to live by in this society. It will help to build the character of those children and provide them with strong conviction to resist societal temptations, particularly during their adolescent stage.

To be able to do this, parents have to do certain reading and learning of their own to understand these Islamic concepts properly, learn how to instill them in the hearts and souls of their children, as well as know how to answer certain questions about Islam to their children. All of the above will keep your motivation high and help you to learn new things about your *Deen insha'a* Allah.

At the family level, we suggest the following:

• We would like to remind fathers that according to most scholars, from an Islamic point of view, parenting is a shared and joint responsibility and duty between both parents (Mom and Dad). Both have to work together as a team and come up with their parenting plan, divide tasks, do their share and carry out duties in implementing their parenting plan. This doesn't mean that the father will spend the same amount of time with children as the mother, particularly if the father is working outside home 8-10 hrs a day and the mother is mainly working at home. The mother will continue to be the main care giver of the children. However, the father has to be part of the planning process and has to carry certain tasks related to the raising of the children. Another area where the father could help is to free the mother from taking care of the kids for one or two nights a week, so that she can attend a study circle to keep herself motivated or simply rejuvenate herself through any kind of appropriate entertainment with other Muslim sisters.

• Father and Mother should have a serious discussion about the family priorities. They should make up a priority list and keep the children at the top of this list. As a result of this process, the family may have to give up some of their old habits to be able

to manage their time properly and save badly needed time for their children's development. For example, at this stage of their life, they may have to give up cooking fresh meals every day or even every second day. Mom and Dad could work together during the weekend to cook a few dishes, keep them in the fridge, and warm them on weeknights for dinner. Without a doubt, this will save much-needed family time to spend with the children and keep the motivation going. Eating leftovers or ordering food from a restaurant once in a while may also help. Every little bit will help in saving time and making sure we provide our children with the needed attention and care, as well as having time for our spiritual and mental development that will keep us motivated to work for the sake of this *Deen insha'a* Allah

At the community level, we suggest the following:

• Activities planned at the community level should always take family needs into consideration. Our communities consist of groups of families. Our families are not fathers alone, or mothers alone or children alone. Our families are a combination of all of the above (fathers, mothers, and children at various age groups). It is unfair to always organize activities for fathers alone and not include mothers and children. It is also unfair to organize activities for adults alone (mothers and fathers) and forget about children. Try your best to convince your community members and activity organizers to plan activities with families in mind. This means:

- Make sure that there is babysitting available for young children so mothers can attend the activity

- Make sure that there are interesting programs for pre-teens, and teens, alongside the main program for adults

- If this is not possible alternate activities so sisters can attend while brothers can take care of children and vice versa

We hope that the above will help you during this challenging time with three children. May Allah *SWT* keep us motivated and help us to carry out our duties to the best of our ability in various areas of our life.

Most of us were raised back home in the East where negative reinforcement was used a lot, but we still turned out to be good Muslims. So how come negative reinforcement worked out for most of us but it doesn't work for our children??

We don't really understand exactly what you mean by using negative reinforcement. Also, we don't clearly know what criteria you used to come to the conclusion that all of us turned out to be good Muslims. These are two important factors that, given more clarity, could help us give you a better answer to your question. However, these are not the only factors that affect the outcome of the parenting process. Environment, modeling, support systems, and the difference in the era you were raised are just a few to be named. As such, we could discuss and point out these factors in an effort to analyze your question. Here are some important points to consider:

- It looks like the comparison you are making between your generation and that of your children is rather unscientific. We think you are probably comparing them at two completely different stages of life, looking at your generation now at adulthood after settling down, achieving maturity, and awareness of their goals, while looking at the generation of your children at their adolescent stage. I'm sure if you scratch your memory a little and try to remember your own generation when they were teenagers, you will find many things that they did that are almost exactly the same as your children's generation now.

• For your generation, which was raised in majority-Muslim countries, even if negative reinforcement (whatever it means) was used with you by your parents, there are other factors in the lives of your generation that may have compensated for the inappropriate reinforcement, such as the following:

- The extended family provided huge support to the unit family and helped in raising the children. This kind of help is not available for the majority of parents here in North America. They have to do the parenting alone without extended family support.

- Your generation had built in support by living in a Muslim najority society. Growing up in a Muslim majority society provides tremendous support for parents who are trying to instill Islamic values into their children's hearts and souls. The majority's social behavior is nearly harmonious, homogenous, and accepted by the rest of the society. Also, Muslim behavior enhancers are plenty and constitute a great part of the support system for children. For example, there was always something related to Islam and its basic principles in various media sources (books, newspapers, radio, and television networks). *Qur'anic* recitation is always aired on radio and TV stations. The *Adhan* (call to prayer) can be heard regularly everywhere a child turns. Mosques are located in every corner of the city with scholars who are available to teach and answer questions almost 24 hours a day. Religious occasions are celebrated regularly. Parents are

not shy to identify with Islam. On the whole, the atmosphere is very encouraging, conducive, peaceful, and supportive for anyone who chooses to adhere to Islamic values and practice them.

• Your children are not only deprived of the support system described above, but they are also faced with a completely different environment which presents them with many difficult challenges and tremendous sources of pressures, such as the following:

- Day-to-day peer pressure at school, including school dances, parties, dress problems for girls, friends, smoking and drugs, etc.

- Religious holiday celebration pressure, including Christmas and Easter

- Pressure in specific instances when Western Media report on incidents and events related to Islam and Muslims in a biased and unfair manner[76]

• The time factor is another important point to consider in this discussion. We are talking about two different generations, which means an almost 25 year difference. Many things have happened during this time that affect the environment of our children's generation, and the most relevant to this discussion are the following two factors:

[76] For detailed list of challenges and problems see chapter 3 of our book ***Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West: An Islamic Perspective***

- New technologies, without a doubt, have contributed to the easy access to all kinds of information for our children's generation. Although some of this information can be beneficial to their academic advancement, it may not necessarily all be good for their social and spiritual well being. There are many problems related to Internet use and other electronic media to which our children's generation is subjected. Your generation was spared these problems, or, if you had to deal with them, it was on a very small scale.

- Moral norms have been majorly downgraded during the last few decades, and what was not acceptable morally in your generation is now the norm and is accepted by nearly every one from the children's generation. The moral bar has become very low and this trend is continuing.

I hope the above analysis has shed some light and provided you with an explanation for what you are looking for.

What would you say to parents who fight for power, meaning they always try to win their arguments and fights with their teens, and how can they instead become their friends? We don't really understand exactly what you mean by using negative reinforcement. Also, we don't clearly know what criteria

Answer The first thing I would say to them is, 'Fear Allah in the way you deal with your teens'. I hope this will open their minds and hearts to read the rest of the answer attentively and take my advice seriously *insha'a* Allah.

According to the majority of Muslim scholars, parenting is a shared and joint responsibility between mother and father. This means that they have to work together as a team to achieve the best results parenting their children. It starts with learning together the Islamic parenting skills as practiced by Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* and his followers, putting together a parenting (*Tarbiyah*) plan, and then dividing the plan into tasks to be assigned to both of them to execute.

In our Muslim communities living in the West, we have witnessed both extremes. In one extreme some fathers say to their spouses, "My job is to put food on the table and I have nothing to do with the children. Children are your responsibility." This is one extreme that is not acceptable by Islam. On the other end of the pendulum, some mothers spend their entire day talking with their friends on the phone, and when one of their children does something wrong, they tell them to stay in their room until the father comes home from work and deals with them. This is another

extreme that is not also acceptable from the Islamic point of view. The first example is a father who is not participating in the parenting process at all, and leaving the whole job to be done by his wife. The second example is that of a mother who is neglecting one of her major duties. Both are wrong. Instead, both should work together as a team for the benefit of their children.

However, we should be clear that this doesn't mean that the father will spend exactly the same amount of time as the mother with the children, particularly if he's working long hours outside home, and the mother is mainly working inside the home. It means that the father is involved in the process and is part of the planning and execution of the *tarbiyah* plan with his wife. He is carrying out certain tasks to the best of his ability. Most importantly, it means that neither parent will undermine the authority or responsibility of the other parent, particularly in front of the children. For example, if one parent makes a certain decision related to one of the children, even if the other parent does not agree with the decision, s/he shouldn't interject on the spot in front of the child, expressing her/his disagreement with the decision. A better approach is to overlook the issue in front of the child, and then discuss it in private, as advised by the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*. Then, after discussion, allow the other parent to modify the decision with the child. This approach will ensure that the child sees his parents working as a team without differences. Interjecting on the spot will send the wrong message to the child, who will feel that his parents are not in agreement on their parenting approach. As such, the child may abuse these differences between the parents to get his way.

To conclude this answer, we would like to emphasize that there is nothing wrong with trying to be close to our teens. As a matter of fact, it is recommended that we, as parents, should do everything possible to be close to our teens. Having a close relationship with them helps

parents to be in touch with what is going with their teens and puts them in a better position to help with the many challenges they are facing. Here are some suggestions to help parents build a strong relationship with their teens:

- Understand their environment. You may be living under the same roof, but undoubtedly your teen's environment is very different from yours. Volunteering in your teen's school will give you a glimpse of her environment.[77] However, please be careful to pick the proper area of volunteerism in the school. It is not recommended to volunteer in your teen's classroom, or for activities particularly related to your teen. It is better to volunteer in a general area, such as the school library.

- Understand the changes that they are going through and what is taking place during the adolescent stage, and be sensitive to their feelings[78]

- Actively listen to them and allow them to express their thoughts openly without being judgmental

- Dialog with them as opposed to lecturing them. Encourage them to ask any questions they have on their minds without fear of being reprimanded

Both parents should be following this approach as part of their well-thought-out *tarbiyah* plan. No single parent should be competing against the other parent to win the teen's heart. The teen needs both parents and needs to feel that he is safe and secure in this relationship with either of them.

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[77] See chapter one and two of our book ***Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope***, published by amana publications

[78] Same as previous reference

How should parents greet each other in front of the children? Should it be a hug, a kiss, or only hand shakes? Are parents allowed to kiss on the lips in front of the children?

Answer The character of *Hayaa'* in Islam is a very important and core character, to the extent that the Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* said, "for every religion there is a core character, and the core character of Islam is *Hayaa.*'"[79] Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* also is reported to have said, "*hayaa'* is a branch of faith"[80]

There is no single word in the English language that is equivalent to the word *Hayaa'*, or can communicate the real meaning of the concept. The closest is a combination of modesty, decency, bashfulness, and the proper amount of shyness. Believing men and believing women are instructed to observe *hayaa'* in all their dealings. Protecting our chastity, covering our private parts, and dressing modestly are but a few items illustrating the observation of the concept of *hayaa'* in a Muslim's life. Seeking permission by all adults before entering a closed house or a closed room is highly emphasized and stressed in Qura'n. Even children who have not reached puberty yet are instructed and should be trained to seek permission before entering the closed rooms of their parents at specific times of the day. As soon as they reach puberty, they should seek permission all the time. Here is the translation of two verses from *Surat Al-Noor.*

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[79] Ibn Majjah
[80] Al Bukhary

"O you who believe! Let your slaves, and those of you who have not come to puberty, ask leave of you at three times (before they come into your presence): Before the prayer of dawn, and when ye lay aside your raiment for the heat of noon, and after the prayer of night. These are three times of privacy for you. It is no sin for them or for you at other times, when some of you go round attendant upon others (if they come into your presence without leave). Thus Allah makes clear the revelations for you. Allah is Knower, Wise. And when the children among you come to puberty then let them ask leave even as those before them used to ask it. Thus Allah makes clear His revelations for you. Allah is Knower, Wise."[81]

The verses clearly explain why this permission should be thought at these times. They are times of privacy, when parents may be relaxed in the way they dress, or may be engaged intimately.

Based on the above verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, we feel that kisses on the lips or sexual hugs between parents are not right for children to see. However, showing affection is no problem as long as it is not done in an intimate way. It helps the children to feel secure and safe in the family relationship. A kiss on the check or the forehead or an innocent hug should be OK *insha'a* Allah.

[81] (Q24, V58,59)

I've heard this saying about training children and wasn't sure if it was correct or not? As the saying goes, training children consists of three stages. For the first seven years, treat your child like a king, for the next sever years (from 7-14), treat him like a slave and teach him what is right and what is wrong, and for the third seven years (from 14-21), treat him as an advisor. Is this a saying of the prophet PBUH?

The actual saying is "Play with your child for the first seven years; discipline him for the next seven years; and befriend him for the next seven years, then have no control whatsoever over him." There is a second saying that is almost the same with the exception of the last part, where it says: "then let him to have his own experiences."

This is not one of the sayings of the Prophet *SAAW*. Some scholars refer this saying to various companions of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* such as Omar Ibn Al-Khattab *RAA*. Other scholars refer this saying to Sufian Al Thawrey *RAA*.

We would like to point out that, while the above sayings are words of wisdom, they should not be misunderstood. Many parents may use these sayings as an excuse not to discipline their children when they make mistakes as long as they are under 7 years old. As the questioner said, they are trying to treat them as kings. This is not what is meant by playing with your children during the first seven years of their life.

Rather, the saying means that at this young age, parents should play with them more often, as compared to the next stage of life, while still disciplining them whenever the situation requires disciplining. The practice of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* is our reference and guide in everything. Although he used to regularly play with his grandsons Alhassan and Alhussain, on more than one occasion he *SAAW* disciplined and corrected their behaviour while they were in their first seven years of age. Here are a couple of these incidents:

- "Ali *RAA* said, that The Prophet *SAAW* came to visit them and that while he was with Alhassan and Alhussain. Alhassan asked for water. The Prophet filled a cup and brought it to him. Alhussain jumped to take the water, but the Prophet prevented him. Fatima *RAA* said 'it looks like Alhassan is more beloved by you.' The Prophet said, 'no, but he requested the water first'"[82]

- "Abu Laila *RAA* said that he was visiting the prophet *SAAW* who was carrying Alhassan, who urinated on the prophet's clothes. They rushed to take Alhassan from him, but the Prophet told them to leave him finish his business. He purified his clothes with water, then went to the *Saddaqa* house with the boy who took one date and put it in his mouth. The Prophet *SAAW* took it out and told him, 'we are not allowed to eat from the *Saddaqa*'"[83]

Another important point is that even though the second stage is characterized by discipline, this doesn't mean that parents should not play with their children during this second seven years of their life. It means that

[82] At-Tabarany
[83] Ahmad

the focus is on serious training, and that this is the age where all parents should start training their children to learn how to establish prayer and be regular and constantly practicing it, as we were advised by Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*.[84]

The Prophet *SAAW* taught and trained many of the young companions in important matters of *deen* while they were at this age, among them Anas *RAA* and Abdullah Ibn Abbas *RAA*. Here is one example of what he did:

"On the authority of Abdullah bin Abbas, who said: One day I was behind the prophet and he said to me:

'Young man, I shall teach you some words [of advice]: Be mindful of Allah, and Allah will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask of Allah; if you seek help, seek help of Allah. Know that if the Nation were to gather together to benefit you with anything, it would benefit you only with something that Allah had already prescribed for you, and that if they gathered together to harm you with anything, they would harm you only with something Allah had already prescribed for you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.'"[85]

The third stage is characterized by treating our children as our companions. We should consult with them and give them responsibilities, but we can also still advise them and try our best to transfer our life experience to them.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that these stages are not rigid.

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[84] Abu Dawoud and At-Termithy

[85] At-Termithy

They are only guidelines, and some children may need more play, or discipline, or befriending than others, even in the same age group. The maturity level varies from one child to another and also varies between different genders. Parents should be wise enough not to generalize and should deal with each situation based on knowledge and taking into consideration all relevant factors to ensure proper results and continue to be successful in their parenting quest.